

THE INDEPENDENT

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TUESDAY 1 APRIL 1995

WEATHER: Warm and sunny

(R45p) 40p



IN THE TABLOID:

FIS EVERY HOME SHOULD HAVE THEM

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DAVID BADDIEL: MY FRIEND SUSIE

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NETWORK+ HOLIDAYS IN CYBERSPACE PLUS IT APPOINTMENTS



Message to the country: Tony Blair and John Prescott unveiling Labour's general election posters at Chilton Park near Maidstone, Kent yesterday

Photograph: Edward Sykes

Thatcher lined up to be Blair's ambassador in Washington

EXCLUSIVE

by Jojo Moyes

Tony Blair will appoint Baroness Thatcher to the post of Washington ambassador in return for her endorsing Labour shortly before 1 May. The Independent can reveal.

Lady Thatcher has already told friends that she admires Mr Blair's disciplined determination. She was reported in the Daily Mail last September saying: "He knows exactly what he wants and how to go about achieving it."

Mr Blair, for his part, has put his respect for Lady Thatcher's leadership qualities on record. He wants to create a new politics, in which talented and experienced people of all views are welcomed into government, regardless of their views.

Labour advisers emphasise that Washington is deemed the perfect post because the former Tory prime minister cuts a formidable figure in American political circles.

She is regarded almost reverentially by the Capitol Hill elite, as well as academic and business folk across the US. The understanding has been brokered by one of the Washington embassy's former rising stars, Jonathan Powell, who left the diplomatic service to become an aide to Mr Blair.

Mr Blair's younger brother, Sir Charles Powell, Lady Thatcher's former foreign policy adviser.

The growing bond between the Blair and Thatcher camps has been aided by the close friendship between Carla, Sir Charles's Italian wife, and Peter Mandelson, Mr Blair's Machiavellian aide: the pair are often seen on each other's arms at soirees.

Lady Thatcher will take over from Sir John Kerr, who, it was announced in February, will return to London later this year to head the Diplomatic Service. A decision on the Washington



Thatcher: Regarded almost reverentially on Capitol Hill

ambassadorship, the most sought-after Foreign Office posting, was to be delayed until after the election. But sources say that the US administration has been sounded out unofficially, and that President Clinton is "more than happy" with the appointment.

If the posting is confirmed, Lady Thatcher will enjoy the comforts of a magnificent Lutetia residence on Massachusetts Avenue, described as the "second-nicest house in Washington", with its white colonnade, footmen, white and gold Minton china decorated with the Royal cypher, and up to £14m a year running costs.

Sir Denis Thatcher has already made one "reconnaissance" trip to scout out which of Washington's exclusive country clubs will become his golfing venue. He will find President Clinton a keen partner on the greens. At an auction in aid of his daughter's school last year there was fierce bidding for the President's offer of 18 holes with himself at the Army-Navy Country Club.

As one source close to Mr Blair put it last night: "Who cares what she did to Britain? What matters now is whether she'll help us win Basildon."

Major slides backwards into the sleazy mire

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

Tony Blair yesterday promised to raise the election above sleaze, but John Major promptly dragged his party back into the mire with a clear warning to Neil Hamilton that he could be expelled from the Commons if he persisted in standing for long.

In an astonishing open letter to all Conservative association chairmen, the Prime Minister said that the Commons had "draconian powers" to act against wrongdoers.

Although it did not mention Mr Hamilton by name, the letter's message was clear: "All those many issues may be unresolved now but they won't remain unresolved for long," it said.

The move was being read as a last-ditch attempt to persuade the Tory association in Tatten to endorse Mr Hamilton as their candidate at the adoption meeting on 7 April, and as a final appeal to get him to stand down.

The report of the Commons Select Committee on Standards and Privileges would be published after the election and if it criticised Conservative MPs, Mr Major said: "I for one will wish Parliament to act quickly and decisively to uphold its reputation."

The House of Commons has draconian powers. The Conservative Party will support their use if criticism is severe enough to merit it. It can, of course, also withdraw the whip if that seems appropriate.

Mr Major will today reinforce the message with a Westminster press conference, which is now certain to be dominated by questions of sleaze. By taking the issue head on, the Prime Minister is attempting to burn out the sleaze controversy and get the Conservatives back on track before the launch of their election manifesto tomorrow.

Unsubstantiated allegations "should not cheat the electorate of the debate about which party is best suited to form the government for the next five years", Mr Major wrote.

A senior party source said last night: "The party is frustrated that the election campaign has been diverted from the real issues. The Prime Minister is not ducking these issues. He is willing to deal with them, and answer questions."

INSIDE
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Clearly disclosing his own

the seat is for the candidate."

The Conservative campaign risks becoming more mired in the sleaze allegations of cash for questions against Mr Hamilton.

6 Sleaze may hurt the Tories, but it hurts politics too. It hurts this election. It helps nobody

frustration at his failure to get on to policy issues in the election campaign, the Prime Minister said that under Tory party rules, he did not have the power to impose new candidates on the constituencies, but he added: "The decision to contest

and the embarrassing "kiss in the park" photographs of Piers Merchant, the MP for Beckenham, at a time when Labour strategists believed that the public were becoming tired of the sleaze issue.

Unveiling Labour's campaign

slogan "Britain deserves better", Mr Blair yesterday he wanted to raise the campaign above sleaze.

He announced that he had ordered the "two-faced" John Major posters to be replaced with positive messages on new sites across Britain. "Sleaze may hurt the Tories, but it hurts politics too. It hurts this election. It helps nobody," he said.

The launch of Labour's campaign in the sumptuous grounds of a Kent country house hotel was intended to focus Labour's appeal at Conservative voters in the key Tory marginals.

While Mr Major fights sleaze, Alan Howarth, the Tory defector to Labour, will today be used by his new party's leadership to appeal to floating Conservative voters to trust Mr Blair, as the two main parties begin their election campaigns in earnest.

Giving top billing to Mr Howarth, the former Tory MP for Stratford-on-Avon, in Warwickshire, Labour campaign strategists led by Peter Mandelson are changing the tone of their campaign to avoid alienating Conservative voters.

Flanked by Mr Blair and the shadow Chancellor, Gordon

Brown, Mr Howarth, who was recently selected for the safe Labour seat of Newport East, will tell disillusioned Tories that the Conservatives will become more extreme if they win the election.

The Prime Minister's attack on sleaze came after clear signs of disarray in the Conservative camp over how to handle the MPs who refused to quit. The day began with a party grandee, Dame Jill Knight, signalling that the Tory leadership had given up its hopes of dumping the MPs after a weekend of pressure to get them to go gracefully.

The deputy Labour leader, John Prescott, said that the Tories were "a party that can't be led with a leader that can't lead".

Mr Major faces further trouble next Thursday when he goes to Scotland, where his party chairman, Sir Michael Hirst, has resigned over allegations about his private life. Labour will be launching its own manifesto on "One Nation" themes, including a promise to underpin family life, giving employees the right to annual holidays, parental leave and a maximum working week of 48 hours.

QUICKLY

SAF asbestos claims
Two dozen black South African workers are to give evidence in London against the British companies which they say poisoned them with mercury and asbestos. Page 8

Marching begins
The sharp divisions within Ulster nationalism were publicly cheapened yesterday when the new marching season's first disputed parade passed off with a serious incident in south Belfast. Page 5

Russia's tax D-day
Today is the deadline for Russians to hand in their personal income tax returns, an opportunity to discover if the government has made any progress with a massive campaign to bring an end to an epidemic of tax-dodging. Page 11

Kinshasa waits
Rebels are advancing in the east. Western troops are lurking across the river, and one of the president's closest allies has just denounced him, yet in Zaire's plundered capital of Kinshasa life goes on with an air of surreal normality. Page 12

'The rocks fell without warning'

Richard Smith

Two scout leaders were crushed to death yesterday when 10 tons of rocks collapsed on them while they sat talking round a camp fire. Another scout leader, Marcus Hill, 25, was sitting against a rock face on the opposite side of the camp fire and escaped unhurt.

The scout leaders had lit the bonfire beneath an overhanging 15ft-high sandstone rock outcrop to celebrate the last night of their three-day Easter camp at Cider Hill Farm, Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire.

Only two hours before the tragedy occurred, all 12 scouts from KD 11 troop in Kidderminster had been sitting round the fire, enjoying a sing song.

But at 11pm three of the scout leaders took the children, aged 12 to 15, back to their tents in a meadow 150m away. The boys were then given hot chocolate and went to sleep. Two of the leaders stayed by the fire and Marcus joined

them later. They were unwinding and having a can of beer, said Supt Peter Picken of West Mercia police. "The incident has all the hallmarks of a tragic accident."

The scout group had stayed regularly at the farm for more than a decade and always built their camp fire under the rocky outcrop to avoid damaging the farmer's field. It is thought that the heat from the fire, combined with the cold night air, may have caused the rockfall.

The two scout leaders who died were buried beneath one rock which weighed more than two tons.

Marcus Hill had helped to supervise the scouts' bedtime and then returned to join Stuart Perkins and David Weaver by the fire. They were sitting on the floor in the most comfortable places around the fire, so he squatted opposite them, against the rock face.

"We were actually sat round the fire talking and without warning the rocks just fell on



The scene in Shropshire where two scout leaders died

us," said Mr Hill who was treated in hospital for shock. "There was no warning whatsoever. We were talking about television, cars, life in general and the rocks just fell on top of them."

"They both disappeared from view when the rocks fell. I was not touched by the rocks."

Mr Hill, who has been the

pack's scout leader for two years, clawed at the rocks to rescue his friends. All three had joined the scout troop as cubs when they were eight. He said: "I couldn't move the rocks. I just crawled over the top of the rocks which were piled up about three-feet high."

Mr Hill ran almost half a mile to raise the alarm at a call box

shortly before 1am yesterday. Firemen removed the rocks using slings and a JCB. Tony Mullard, who was in charge of the operation, said: "It appears the heat from the fire caused the rocks to become unstable."

The scouts were asleep in their tents when the disaster struck. They were taken to the village scout hut in Cleobury Mortimer and given chocolate until their parents arrived to collect them during the night.

Some scouts and their leaders were in tears as they returned to pack up camp yesterday. They were due to have tackled an assault course and gone swimming.

Mr Hill's girlfriend, Sandra Oliver, was among the five scout leaders in charge of the children at the camp.

Group scout leader Martin Packler said: "The two young lads who died were very dedicated scouts. They had come up from the cubs and they lived and breathed scouting. They just loved it."

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significant shorts

The perfect bank holiday – warm, sunny and empty

Britain has just had its warmest and sunniest Easter since 1989, with temperatures rising to 16-17°C away from sea breezes, but a record 1.5 million people missed it by leaving the country.

Airports in the United Kingdom handled about 900,000 passengers over the holiday period. Gatwick reported an "incredibly busy" time, with 294,000 passengers in the main four days. 17 per cent up on last year, and Heathrow had 1.2 million from last Wednesday to today – 42,000 more than last year.

The Channel Tunnel was being used to the limit of the restricted capacity allowed since last year's fire. Le Shuttle said it carried 110,000 car passengers on its trains, nearly 15 per cent more than last Easter. Eurostar said 120,000-140,000 people used its trains between London and Paris or Brussels, close to its maximum. Not to be beaten, the main cross-Channel ferry operators also reported near-capacity bookings.

Before the evening traffic build-up, AA Roadwatch said some of the busiest roads were around Whipsnade zoo park in Bedfordshire, where a baby white rhinoceros the size of a Labrador dog but "with dinner-plate feet and enormous ears" was adding to the attractions.

Two die at railway blackspot

Two teenagers died after being hit by a passenger train at a notorious blackspot for rail vandals in Leeds. One was killed instantly and the other was declared dead at hospital soon after they were struck by the Middlesbrough-to-Manchester airport train travelling at around 70mph on Sunday night.

The youths, 15 and 17, were found near the main trans-Pennine line. A Railtrack spokeswoman said yesterday that a third youth who was present ran away but was later traced and was being questioned by police. She said the accident scene, near a road bridge over the two rail lines, was known as a blackspot for trespassing and vandalism. Railtrack and British Transport Police launched an immediate inquiry.

Tower miners open their doors

Tower Colliery, Britain's only worker-owned pit and Wales's only surviving deep mine, is opening a window on mining history with a visitor centre, inaugurated yesterday in the shadow of the pit's winding gear in the Lee of Rhigos Mountain near Aberdare.

The colliery has been producing coal for more than a century and was saved from closure by British Coal in 1994 after the 240 miners each chipped in £8,000 to buy it. It has been run at a profit for the last two years.

Tyronne O'Sullivan (far left of picture), former secretary of the Colliery's National Union of Mineworkers' lodge and now a director of the pit co-op believes the saga of Tower's survival has lessons for other enterprises struggling to stay afloat. "Community support was vital to us. Our new visitors' centre underlines this and is a lasting tribute to those who helped us," Mr O'Sullivan said.

The centre uses videos, photographs, historic documents and press cuttings to describe the pit's fight for survival. Tony Heath

Diving trio suffer bends

Three British divers were yesterday said to be "doing well" at a special medical unit in Belgium after getting into difficulties off the Kent coast.

The trio, all members of a diving club in Folkestone, were thought to be suffering from "the bends" when they surfaced, a Dover coastguard said. He said that a helicopter had first planned to take the three men to a decompression unit at Portsmouth, Hampshire, but it was unable to land because of fog. The next nearest unit was in Ostend.

Scilly Isles clean-up

Environmental experts have expressed confidence that oil washed ashore from the Antiguan-registered cargo ship *Cita*, which went aground off the Scilly Isles in gales last week, would cause little coastal damage.

In an operation to clean a beach at Porth Hellick bay, a site of special scientific interest on St Mary's, oiled sand will be removed by mechanical diggers, cleaned and returned to the beach, and rocks will be washed by local authority workmen and Marine Control Pollution Unit personnel. The tug *Salvage Chief* continued pumping around 90 tonnes of fuel oil from the wrecked vessel.

Fatal end to stag party

Police were yesterday investigating the death of a best man who fell from a mini-bus returning from a stag party at the weekend. Police said the bus was travelling at about 13mph when the man jumped or fell as the group he was with was returning to Doncaster from York. The 25-year-old suffered serious head injuries and died later in Doncaster Royal Infirmary.

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Kirsty Young: Smooth operator or Selina Scott without the brains?

Judgement day for the brave news face of Channel Five

Kirsty Young, the young Scotswoman catapulted into anchoring *Channel 5 News* amidst much hype, got an early chance to prove she's no dumb blonde last night by cross-examining on camera the man most likely to be Prime Minister on 2 May.

As she probed Tony Blair in a five set-piece interview, those of us on the receiving end of all the surrounding puff and publicity were granted a swift opportunity to judge whether she is as smart and cool under pressure as her new bosses boast or "Selina Scott without the brains", as her harshest critics have suggested.

The Blair interview was a predictable play to ensure that the first full edition of *Channel 5's* flagship news programme generated some headlines of its own. But, Britain's last free-to-air television network will have to work hard on the publicity front if it is to weave itself into the fabric of British life in the next few weeks and months.

Only one of its first night offerings – a curtain-raising show featuring a specially commissioned song by the

Spice Girls – attracted over 2 million viewers on Sunday night, according to unofficial overnight figures which emerged yesterday.

The opening episode of its five-night-a-week soap *Family Affairs* was watched by just 1.5 million people – less than a tenth of the number which tunes into *EastEnders* or *Coronation Street*. The same modest number bothered to watch *Beyond Fear*, a drama about the Stephanie Slater kidnapping.

Even fewer – around 1 million according to the early estimates – tuned into the debut edition of *The Jack Docherty Show*, which starred the Spice Girls (again) and ageing heartthrob Roger Moore. Earlier in the evening, the opening episode of medical spoof *Hospital!* also drew around 1 million.

None the less, *Channel 5* executives were as determinedly upbeat as their station's misery-free soap yesterday, claiming an early victory in the ratings war over their closest rivals *Channel 4*.

Pointing out that its prime-time share of total audience was 5.8 per cent compared with 4.7 per cent for

Channel 4, a *Channel 5* spokeswoman said: "We are very happy with the figures especially as it was such a beautiful sunny bank holiday. It is a very good result considering we are aiming for a 5 per cent overall share by the end of the year."

The figures are certainly broadly in line with the modest forecasts *Channel 5* wisely issued on the eve of its first transmission. Normally new networks can count upon a high curiosity factor playing in their favour, but launching on Easter Sunday was always going to be a disadvantage.

The number of calls flooding into *Channel 5's* special helpline – 3.5 million in the last fortnight – suggest that the station has aroused the public's interest and awareness. Most inquiries have been about reception problems or requests for programme information, with only 4 per cent about re-tuning.

Since coming on air, a fresh complaint has been about the 5 logo which is superimposed permanently on the top left-hand corner of the television screen – seen by the station's marketing team as a smart piece of branding. Rob Brown

Turbulent day for priest in human rights protest

A Catholic priest in Liverpool who yesterday conducted an Easter service with a human rights message was arrested for his trouble.

Father Arthur Fitzgerald, of St Michael's church in Liverpool, was arrested inside a British Aerospace factory at Warton in Lancashire after he held an Easter liturgy with parishioners and refugees to demonstrate against human rights abuses in Indonesia.

The factory constructs Hawk trainer jets which are sold to Indonesia where, human rights activists maintain, they are used against the people in East Timor.

At dawn, a party of eight protesters including Fr Fitzgerald formed a human chain to climb the fence at the base to protest.

The demonstration marked the start of a day of action at the base, where 50 other demonstrators later held a peaceful prayer service outside the gates.

Four East Timor refugees joined the demonstrators, singing songs, unfurling banners and giving out Easter eggs to BAE's security guards.

Fr Fitzgerald and the eight protesters were arrested after the security guards asked them to leave, escorted them to the perimeter fence and handed them over to the police. Before his arrest Fr Fitzgerald

said: "British Aerospace Hawk jets are being used by the Indonesian regime to support attacks in East Timor and West Papua. This trade in death has to stop."

BAE would not comment on the claims by protesters but confirmed the protest had gone ahead and said their response to any demonstration "is as always to respect any lawful protest but to take positive action in the event that any illegal acts are directed against our sites".

The protesters were held for questioning at Lytham police station, near Blackpool, where they were later charged with civil aviation trespass, according to Lancashire police. Fr Fitzgerald and three other British nationals, none of whom were named by the police, were released on bail to appear before magistrates today.

The East Timor refugees were remanded in police custody and were also due to appear in the court today, a police spokesman said.

Last July, four women, arrested at the base, were acquitted by a crown court jury in Liverpool of causing criminal damage to a Hawk jet estimated at £10m, after they successfully pleaded they were entitled to use reasonable force in trying to prevent a crime against the people of East Timor. Matthew Brace

Sailor admits he started mutiny in war

A former Royal navy sailor has confessed that he was responsible for staging a mutiny in 1944.

Ian Lawton, 72, described how he and his fellow seamen on board a minesweeper twice attempted to drown an officer whose cowardice and negligence were endangering the lives of the crew.

Mr Lawton claims he and three others decided to push him overboard. Mr Lawton, who lives in Hull, volunteered for the Navy at the age of 17, in 1942.

He recalls the moment he tried to kill the first lieutenant of HMS *Rosario*, while minesweeping in the Adriatic. "I still have nightmares today but I felt it was time to tell the truth," he said. Mr Lawton said the officer used to hide when there were mines around.

He and three others decided to act after shrapnel from an exploding mine killed a sailor. Mr Lawton makes his confession on the BBC 2 series, *The Call of the Sea* on Saturday. The MoD said it would not be pursuing the matter.

ECONOMY

Britain better off in EU, business leaders say

Most firms want Britain to remain in the European Union, although one in four believes the economy would benefit from leaving, a new survey showed today.

More than two out of three businesses polled said the UK economy would benefit from staying in the EU.

The survey of 553 organisations by Reed Personnel Services showed more support for leaving the EU in the South-west, while firms in the Midlands were most in favour of staying in. Larger firms were more likely to argue in favour of remaining in Europe.

Labour's trade and industry spokeswoman Margaret Beckett said: "This survey is overwhelming evidence that the business community recognises the need for Britain to play a constructive role in Europe and recognises also the danger to prosperity and jobs if we were to leave the EU. It thus shows the dangers to which Tory divisions on Europe expose Britain, risking 3.5 million jobs."

The survey also found that senior managers were keener on the staying in Europe than lower ranks, with only 17 per cent of them wanting the UK to leave the EU, compared to 24 per cent of middle managers and 25 per cent of support staff.

There were also differences between business sectors, with 76 per cent of manufacturing businesses thinking the UK should stay in and 19 per cent that it should leave, compared to 60 per cent of distribution and wholesale organisations believing the UK should stay and 31 per cent that it should get out. A quarter of service and retail business and 24 per cent of public sector organisations thought leaving the EU would be better for the UK, along with 17 per cent of charities.

HEALTH

Why breast is best

Children fed on mothers' milk have a ten-point IQ headstart over bottle-fed babies, according to a psychiatric survey today. Those who missed out are not only less bright than they would have been, they are quieter, more withdrawn and make fewer friends at school, the research indicates. They also appear to be at higher risk of developing schizophrenia in later life.

Consultant psychiatrist Dr Robin McCreadie, of the Crichton Royal Hospital, Dumfries, who led the research as part of an investigation into the causes of schizophrenia, said: "Mothers' milk contains an essential constituent, missing from cows' milk, for proper brain development of babies. Breast-fed babies are nearly ten IQ points brighter than those raised on cows' milk."

"The fatty acid [docosahexaenoic acid, known as DHA] in mothers' milk is vital for proper development of the brain and to give it protection from schizophrenia. When all mothers breast-feed their babies, schizophrenia was virtually unknown in Britain. But with the advent of bottle feeding – early last century – the disease gained a foothold."

His survey, published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, shows that seven out of ten schizophrenia patients were not breast-fed.

BUSINESS

Fewer firms going bust

The number of business failures in Britain fell by nearly 10 per cent in the first three months of the year, providing further evidence of the increasing strength of the economy.

During the first quarter, the total number of failures, including companies, partnerships and sole traders, amounted to 10,329 – 1,101 fewer than in the first three months of last year, according to business information company Dun & Bradstreet.

The fall was caused mainly by a sharp drop in the proportion of larger companies going into liquidation, it said. The number of companies going into liquidation fell from 5,237 in the first quarter of last year to 4,517 in the first three months of this year, while the number of bankruptcies of smaller businesses fell by 6.1 per cent during the same period.

Senior analyst Philip Mellor said: "The latest figures are most encouraging after an upturn in the business failure rate during the last quarter of last year. We had feared that an increase in company liquidations might bring down a host of smaller firm bankruptcies in their wake. This has not happened yet, but with the business climate being so competitive, it remains to be seen if the decline in business failures continues throughout the year."

CHILD CARE

Mental scars for traffic victims

Children commonly suffer post-traumatic stress disorder after being involved in a road traffic accident, a new study has found.

Researchers called urgently for health care staff to recognise and treat the potential psychological consequences for children and adolescents as well as ministering to their physical injuries. Writing in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* the researchers looked at 57 injured children who had been brought into five Glasgow hospitals between April and August 1995. Four months on parents reported that nearly half the children suffered from persistent mood disturbances – largely tantrums and mood swings but also sadness and withdrawal. Nearly half still suffered from mild, moderate or severe from post-traumatic stress disorder, 17 per cent from traffic-related fears and more than a quarter still felt wary on the roads. Those who had been most distressed at the time of the accident were most likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder.

The researchers said that it was important for hospital staff to recognise the danger of post-traumatic reaction and they said that where necessary specialist mental health advice should be offered as soon as possible. Glenda Cooper



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Freedom dawns again for a small corner of England

Jojo Moyes

Arthur Hill lives in Rutland. He is proud to be a Rutlander. Indeed, in his 89 years he has only ever travelled as far from it as Skipton.

Under a special feature on Mr Hill, one of the county's "truly grand old characters", the *Rutland Times* says he will greet independence "with a pride and patriotism only born Rutlanders can truly feel".

To the multicultural, shifting communities of cities across the rest of the country, Mr Hill's passion for his home - and his newspaper's passion for Mr

Hill - might seem somewhat curious. But as 1 April returns Rutland to county status, many of its citizens are bringing a similar patriotism for this tiny sector of the Midlands to the fore.

Twenty-three years ago the 18-by-15 mile county was abolished and it became part of Leicestershire. Many Rutlanders continued to refer to it as a county, even using their old postcode. Their feelings were such that even an encyclopaedic reference to Rutland notes: "There is local indignation whenever it is suggested that Rutland should lose its separate identity".

Now, after fierce lobbying by Rutland's council, it again becomes a county today - an event that will be commemorated with a huge display of fireworks, a ball, and no small rejoicing among many of the county's inhabitants, not least traders. There is a commemorative magazine, poster, car sticker, polo shirt, first-day cover, egg cup and even a commemorative Rutland Independent mortgage.

Sylvia Darby, proprietor of the Lord Nelson's House Hotel in Oakham, says the change is not just symbolic. "We really feel it may put tourism on the

map. When we first came here tourism was a bit of a dirty word - it's very much Rutland for the Rutlanders - but the tradespeople particularly feel it may bring more business in."

Locals were hoping the Prince of Wales would attend the ceremony, as he rides with a local hunt, the Quorn, but she and her family would be attending a celebratory ball regardless. "We'll be eating off commemorative plates, and afterwards we get to take them home. Suitably washed, I might add."

The sense of satisfaction in the area came from the fact that

local people had fought "tooth and nail" for the boundary change, Mrs Darby said.

"They never changed their postcode, they would never allow the signs on entering to be taken down either, and they never accepted being part of Leicestershire."

But not everyone is happy about the change. County status, it appears, comes at a price, and many feel the area is simply too small to support itself. The county will have to "buy in" many services from neighbouring counties, and, days before independence, many negotiations had not been completed,

including social services, highways and archive services. A council spokesman said that in some cases neighbouring counties wanted to the Rutland to 10-year contracts, or had withheld contracts altogether.

Jacqui Morrissey, a housewife from Market Overton, said the county was "simply not going to be able to afford its independence". Council tax was going up at an alarming rate, even with transitional relief, and many people believed services were going to go down. "We simply don't have enough industry. How are they going to pay for university grants?

They're already cutting back on education. Policing is already at a stretch and public transport is almost non-existent. Rutland is just too small on its own."

She believed that many people who had been pro-independence would change their minds when they discovered its true cost. "I take several old ladies to sewing classes every week and they're worried. Their pensions aren't going to cover it."

Her daughter Caroline, 22, said Plymouth, where she was at university, felt like a cosmopolitan paradise in comparison. If you were young in Rutland, there were organised

groups like the Venture Scouts, but that was it. "That's why there's such a problem with under-age drinking."

Mrs Morrissey, who would not be attending the fireworks, believed the decision to become independent again had been "purely political".

"It was pushed and pushed. We were always given the good side."

Rutlanders, she said, thought that by regaining their independence they would somehow get back the Rutland of 30 years ago. "They think they'll get the public services they used to have, but it's not the case."

On its own: Rutland Water and its environs, one of the main features of the county, which is now free of the Leicestershire yoke

Photograph: Keith Dobney

Rescuers grieve as Moby dies on sands at Airth

Colin Blackstock

Easter Monday is the busiest day of the year for the Deep Sea World aquarium in Fife, Scotland and this year it was also one of the saddest.

The staff at the aquarium have battled to save Moby, a 40ft sperm whale from beaching itself for the past two weeks, but yesterday lost the war. Moby, who was first spotted in the Firth of Forth 13 days ago, died after becoming beached on mudflats at Airth in the estuary.

Rescuers had tried to redirect Moby eastwards, out of the estuary, but time and again the whale returned to swim inland. Then finally, at midday yesterday, Moby died one hour after becoming trapped in shallow water as the tide went out.

Alex Kilgour, a spokesman for Deep Sea World aquarium, which was co-ordinating the rescue attempts, said: "Moby died very quickly. We were dreading a long, drawn-out death that could have gone on for six to 12 hours, but he died within an hour, which was a blessing in disguise."



Last hours: A boat circling the beached-up whale in the estuary Photograph: Reuter

"We are all extremely sad at Deep Sea World. We tried our utmost as a group of human beings to help Moby, but at the end of the day it wasn't enough."

Doctor Keith Todd, an expert from the aquarium who had spent the last 12 days trying to help the whale, comforted Moby as he died. Rescuers had spent two weeks using boats and divers to try and coax Moby out of the estuary.

Wildlife experts said that Moby probably took a wrong turn on an annual migration

from the Arctic to the Azores and came down the east coast of Scotland instead of the west on his way to the Atlantic.

"When Moby got into the Forth he tried to go west," said Mr Kilgour. "It seems his sonar kept telling him to go west but he couldn't, and he ended up becoming beached."

Those involved in the rescue attempts dismiss any ideas that the whale was on a suicide mission. Dr John Gould of the School of Ocean Sciences, University of Wales, Bangor, said: "I don't think he was trying to

kill himself. If he was, he could have beached a lot sooner."

The public support for Moby and the attempt to save him astonished everyone involved.

"We were taken aback by the public support," said Mr Kilgour. "We didn't realise that it would create such an interest but it shows that the public want to see humans helping animals."

"The most important thing we can do now is sit down and talk about what to do the next time this happens, and learn how we can improve our methods," he said.

Hunt for last BR train departing narrows down to choice of three

Simon Reeve

Even as the final British Rail passenger trains left their platforms last night, BR's infamous timetables - the bane of every traveller - were causing problems for their customers. After almost 50 years of public ownership, groups of excited enthusiasts were left wondering which of three trains really was "the last train departing".

The final BR passenger train to actually reach its destination should be the 9.30 overnight sleeper service from London Euston, which is due to arrive at 10.25 this morning in Fort William.

However, as any BR passenger knows, leaving one station is no guarantee of swift arrival at the next.

Then there was the 23.55 sleeper from Edinburgh to Euston via Glasgow, which was staking its claim as the very last BR train.

Most of those wanting to celebrate the end of BR by travelling on the "final" trains plumped for two ScotRail expresses travelling in opposite directions between Glasgow and Edinburgh, which left just before midnight last night, loaded with trainspotters.

Perhaps final celebrations should have waited until bleary-eyed passengers disembark from the sleeper service. But both the Glasgow and Edinburgh trains were due to arrive early this morning to the sound of music and popping champagne corks as yet another unloved public company with an

image problem steps aside for the private sector.

The confusion over the last train failed to affect celebrations at Waverley station in Edinburgh this morning. Passengers from Glasgow were met by John Bowden, 64, the only rail employee who started his working life before nationalisation.

The event sees the end of the 25th train company, the last to enter private ownership. It is unlikely that British Rail, one of the most ridiculed companies in the land, will be missed.

Free whisky was drunk on the ScotRail expresses as documents were prepared, handing the company over to National Express, a firm better known for buses and coaches.

Despite a frantic 14 months, during which the entire pas-

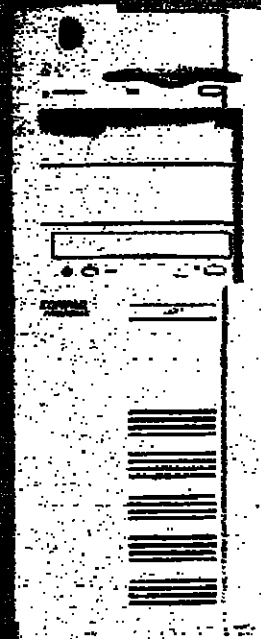
senger network has been sold off, the private sector may not retain control for long if Labour wins the general election, according to Keith Bill, national secretary of the pressure group Save Our Railways. He predicts the majority share of Railtrack and most of the 25 rail train franchises will be back in public ownership within seven years if the opposition takes power.

"Both Labour and Liberal Democrats have reiterated in the last 48 hours that they will take back Railtrack even though Labour will make it clear that they cannot afford to do this in the first five years of a Labour government," Mr Bill said.

"But bringing back Railtrack into the public sector remains Labour's long-term objective."

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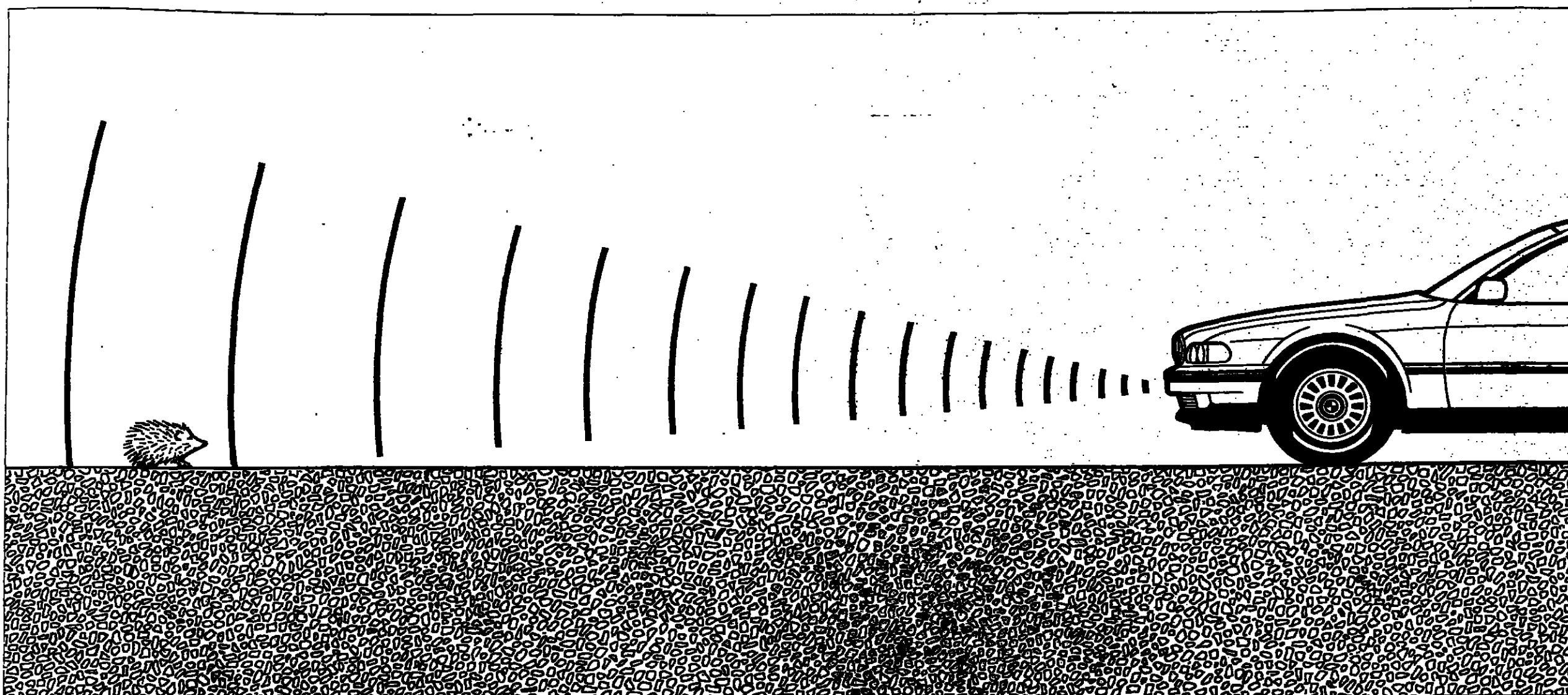
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Spokeswoman: Brooklands Museum in Surrey celebrating the bicycle yesterday with the Annual Cycle Festival

Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

Hanratty case police want to track killer

Kim Songupta

Detectives whose investigation cleared James Hanratty of the A6 murder are unhappy that a new inquiry has not been launched to track down the killer, say police sources.

The Scotland Yard team, under Det Supt Roger Matthews, which concluded Hanratty had been unjustly executed also recommended that a review should be made of the evidence against other suspects.

Not only has Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, unloaded the alleged miscarriage of justice on to the new Criminal Cases Review Commission, but the Home Office has given no indication whether a new inquiry would be held, despite receiving the Matthews report eight months ago.

The CCRC begins to look at possible miscarriages of justice this week. But detectives in the Matthews inquiry have no idea what will happen to their call for

a new investigation. The 18-month re-investigation decided that Hanratty, a petty burglar, could not have murdered the research scientist Michael Gregson, 36, and raped and shot his 22-year-old mistress, Valerie Storr, who was paralysed.

After examining the evidence present at the time the team was of the opinion that Hanratty should not have been charged. Instead, Mr Matthews's team and concluded the man who carried out the attack on 22 August 1961 at Deadman's Hill, Bodfry, was probably hired to break up the illicit liaison.

His report is believed to recommend that a new inquiry should in particular examine evidence regarding Peter Alphon, a salesman who was the original suspect.

But the officers turned their attention from Alphon to Hanratty after a tip-off from William Nudds, an informer and habitual liar. The prosecution of Hanratty, who was 25, concen-

trated on the theory that a lone gunman had carried out a random attack after finding the couple in their car in a cornfield.

Hanratty was hanged in April 1962. Doubts about the conviction played a big part in MPs voting to abolish capital punishment in 1965.

Two years later Alphon confessed in Paris to the rape and murder, but later retracted, a pattern he was to repeat over the years. A man Alphon claimed had set up the attack to deter Gregson from seeing Ms Storr was never interviewed by police. Yesterday a Scotland Yard spokesman said: "We were asked to prepare a report by the Home Office and we have presented them with it. We cannot discuss the content of the report; it is strictly confidential."

A Home Office spokeswoman said: "The files have been sent to the Criminal Cases Review Commission... We cannot comment on the content of the Matthews report."

March highlights loyalist divisions

David McKittrick
Ireland correspondent

The sharp divisions within Ulster loyalism were publicly encapsulated yesterday when the new marching season's first disputed parade passed off without serious incident in south Belfast.

A small parade of the Apprentice Boys of Derry marched towards the Catholic section of the Ormeau road but then, as promised, veered away from a line of Royal Ulster Constabulary Land Rovers and were taken on their way by coach.

Their conduct was applauded by police, who were relieved that the first potential flashpoint of the season had been successfully negotiated, but heckled by people accusing them of cowardice in the face of nationalist opposition.

Although only a small number of marchers and a few dissidents were involved, their comments summed up the running debate taking place in loyalist circles. One tendency believes that the right to march should take precedence over all else, while the other feels the avoidance of conflict should have priority.

Tommy Cheevers of the Apprentice Boys said they had taken their decision to give Northern Ireland a breathing space because the country could not afford a repeat of last year's clashes.

He said most of the protesters were members of Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, adding: "There are always those in our society, unfortunately, who are just bigots and

can't see anything. They only have small lives to live, but I have to say the majority of people realise the moves we're making here."

"We're not prepared to bring confrontation on to our own streets. We have proved we are tolerant people who are prepared to compromise. We have taken all the tension out of the air - people do not want another situation like last July."

Among the more repeatable catcalls from loyalist protesters was "Yellow bastards". Among the dissenters was Pauline Gilmore, whose boyfriend was shot dead by the IRA 16 years ago. She and the others felt the marchers should have made some gesture before turning away. "People feel disgusted, they feel betrayed, they don't understand why there is no form of protest at all."

Meanwhile, debate continued on the significance of remarks by Labour's Mo Mowlam, who at the weekend suggested that in the event of an immediate IRA ceasefire Sinn Féin could enter multi-party talks in Belfast by the summer.

Sources close to Tony Blair, the Labour leader, insisted that there was no chance of Labour sanctioning any meeting with Sinn Féin. However, Ms Mowlam's comments have created speculation that Labour in government might show more flexibility than the Conservatives.

Ulster Unionist MP Ken Maginnis said he was worried by her remarks, while Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin said he regarded the comments as "quite encouraging".

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Song to A.A.

by Emily Brontë

This shall be thy lullaby
Rocking on the stormy sea,
Though it roar in thunder wild
Sleep - stilly sleep - my dark-haired child.

When our shuddering boat was crossing
Elderno lake so rudely tossing,
Then 'twas first my nursing smiled;
Sleep - softly sleep - my fairbrowed child.

Waves above thy cradle break,
Foamy tears are on thy cheek,
Yet the ocean's self grows mild
When it bears my slumbering child.

"Elderno" was a place in Gondal, the imaginary world created by the Brontë siblings in 1834 at the parsonage in Haworth. The Everyman's Poetry selection of verse by Emily, Charlotte, Anne and Patrick Branwell Brontë is edited by Pamela Norris (Everyman/J.M. Dent, £2). The identity of A.A. is unknown.

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news

Teachers in conference: Labour hit back at NUT militants and back traditional maths for the young

Don't try to bully me, says Blunkett

Judith Judd
Education Editor

Labour will not tolerate threats of bullying from teachers' unions or anyone else. David Blunkett, the Labour education spokesman, told the profession's biggest union yesterday.

Mr Blunkett won a standing ovation from more than half his audience at the National Union of Teachers' annual conference in Harrogate, and silence from the rest, after a fighting speech in which he attacked union militants.

Delegates voted at the weekend to take on a Labour government over class size, grammar schools and league tables. And they agreed to strike if a Labour government failed to reduce class sizes for all pupils.

Mr Blunkett said: "We won't tolerate division or bullying or threats, not simply from those who attend union conferences but from anyone who has a vested interest in any part of our country. However important they think they are, they will not stand in the way of myself and my colleagues radically changing the education system."

Outside the conference, Mr Blunkett said teachers should not strike over government policies whether on grammar schools, testing or inspection.

"I don't think withdrawing your labour and leaving children without a teacher assists in lifting standards or raising the esteem of teachers. As ever, withdrawal of labour should be a last resort."

He made it clear that he did not accept plans expected to be revealed in the Conservative manifesto today to ban teachers' strikes.

Mr Blunkett had been expected to receive a rough ride from the most militant dele-

gates, but he was heard with barely a murmur as he backed traditional teaching methods, attacked teacher militancy and argued that low standards were the result of low expectations as well as economic disadvantage.

He was warmly applauded when he said that Labour would abolish the Government's nursery voucher scheme within one school term and would accept that class size mattered.

Labour's pledge to reduce class sizes for 5- to 7-year-olds, he suggested, was the start of a process under which class sizes for older pupils might also be reduced. He said that they could trust him better than anyone to raise standards.

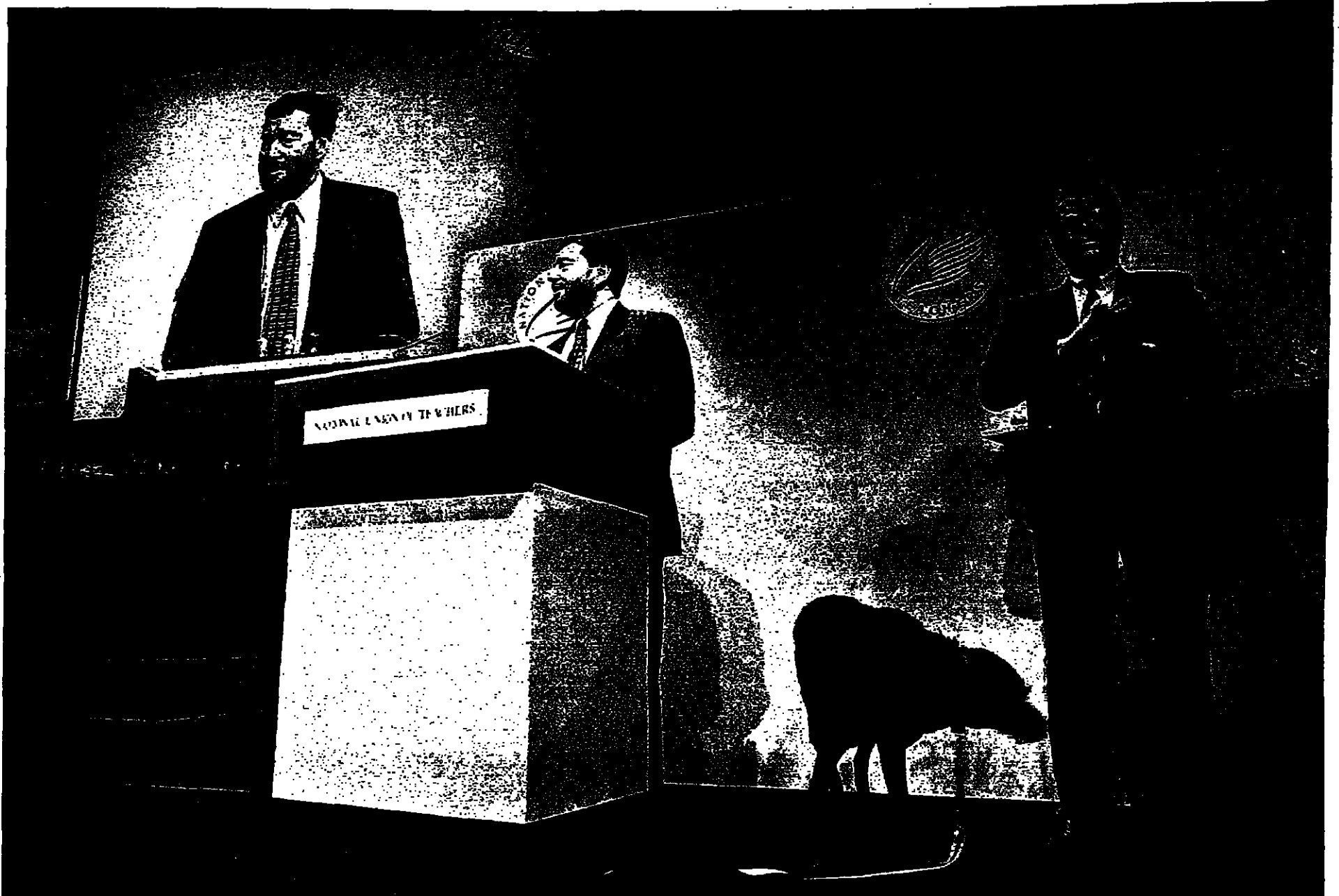
"I had to go to evening classes for six years to get A levels and a business qualification to get into university."

"I taught in the heart of the South Yorkshire coal field where youngsters were bright, able and capable but written off by the system far too easily."

"When my own children went into an inner-city comprehensive with very low academic standards, I determined to liberate the children we represent from past dogmas and fights about the elite succeeding and the rest being written off."

Doug McAvoy, the union's general secretary, said they looked forward with optimism to a Labour government but warned that his members would be prepared to take industrial action if the needs of children and their teachers were not being met.

Gillian Shephard, the Secretary of State for Education, told BBC Radio 4's *World At One*: "If Labour were elected... they would have to reap what they have sown over the years as far as education is concerned. What we heard at the NUT is the voice of the Labour Party."



A rough ride from militants that never came to pass: David Blunkett, Labour's education spokesman, addressing the NUT in Harrogate yesterday. Photograph: John Houlihan/Guzelin

Tables turn on children's calculator culture

Judith Judd

Labour wants to ban calculators for children under the age of eight, David Blunkett said yesterday.

He said a new numeracy taskforce to be set up under Professor David Reynolds, of Newcastle upon Tyne University, would make a final decision about the right age for children to be introduced to calculators.

In comments which echoed many concerns usually voiced by

traditionalists, he said: "Mental arithmetic is a key skill which children must learn. They must also understand the basis on which the calculations are being made."

"Calculators should not be introduced until later in primary schools than is often the case at present. So that once the foundations of mental arithmetic are already in place, they can master how to use them more effectively."

"Numerate pupils must know how to use calculators sensibly

and must be able to make a decision about when to use a calculator. We must ensure that no child is totally reliant on a calculator."

Children needed to learn their tables by heart and how to add and subtract quickly without putting pen to paper, he said.

Most countries introduce calculators into schools at a later stage than Britain.

Mr Blunkett said Labour would introduce new numeracy targets for 11-year-olds.

Three-quarters would be expected to achieve the expected standard within five years and 90 per cent by the year 2007. The present figure is 55 per cent.

In the Third International Maths and Science Study published last year, British 13-year-olds did worse in maths than pupils from about half the 40 countries which took part.

Mr Blunkett said: "Whilst we cannot import practice wholesale from abroad, we must cherry pick the best methods and

tailor them to fit our culture, our system and what parents, teachers and pupils find works best. The taskforce will be reviewing all the research evidence."

"We must learn from Taiwan and the Pacific Rim countries and their success in teaching children the habits of mind which can lead to future educational success."

He had been impressed, he said, by a project in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham in which there is whole-class maths teaching involving

question and answer sessions with the teacher.

Gillian Shephard, the Secretary of State for Education said: "Labour can't add up. David Blunkett has said he intends to set up a numeracy taskforce so he has obviously failed to count the 25 literacy and numeracy centres we have established throughout the country to spread best practice."

The Prime Minister had said he intended to set national targets for all stages of the curriculum, she added.

De Gruchy attacks rival leader over direct action

Lucy Ward
Education Correspondent

A teaching union leader yesterday condemned the president of a rival union who withdrew her daughter from school during national tests as a "disgrace to her profession".

Nigel de Gruchy, general secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, launched his attack after Christine Blower, of the National Union of Teachers, admitted letting her 11-year-old daughter stay at home for three days last year to stop her sitting the compulsory tests in English, maths and science.

Addressing the NUT conference in Harrogate, North Yorkshire, at the weekend, Ms Blower told delegates that they, too, should take direct action to oppose national testing, school inspection and large classes.

The NUT strongly opposed the introduction of the tests for 7-, 11- and 14-year-olds. Mr De Gruchy, speaking before the opening of the NASUWT's annual conference in Bournemouth, Dorset, accused Ms



At odds: Clash between NASUWT's Nigel de Gruchy (left) and NUT's Christine Blower exposes a divided profession



Blower of disgracing the profession "by organising her own child to truant". He said: "You can't have your cake and eat it. You can't argue for a state education system and then in effect argue that every parent has the right to do whatever they like."

The move set a "very dangerous precedent" he added. "If

every time parents disagreed, they retained the right to withdraw their child, there would be chaos."

Ms Blower, 45, of Hammer-smith, west London, who teaches children with behavioural difficulties, pledged to remove her second daughter, Eleanor, 6, from school during the key stage-one tests in maths and

English which she is due to take next year. She told the conference: "As a parent and teacher I will continue to support campaigns to rid education of blanket testing on our children."

The clash exposes divisions between the main teaching unions which appear to be widening in the run-up to the election. While NUT delegates voted to ballot for strike action if a new government failed to cut class sizes to a maximum of 30, Mr De Gruchy went out of his way to stress that the NASUWT conference would "certainly not be threatening an in-coming government... with strike action in the next month or two if problems which have built up over the last couple of decades are not immediately resolved."

However, he spoke of his "alarm" at leaked Tory manifesto proposals to ban strikes by teaching unions, describing the move as "naked fascism". He said: "If that is what the Conservative Party is proposing then it is high time for the nation to wake up. It might be teacher trade unions today. Tomorrow it could be the press."

NAS-UWT puts class discipline at the top of conference agenda

Lucy Ward

The teaching union which waged bitter battles over discipline at the Ridings and three other schools today places classroom disruption at the top of its agenda at the start of its annual conference.

The National Association of Schoolmasters-Union of Women Teachers, which warns that despite four victories it has still to win the discipline war, will demand more support for teachers in dealing with disruptive or violent pupils.

Delegates at the union's annual conference in Bournemouth will today be recommended to accept a report rejecting the principle of keeping as many children as possible in mainstream schools.

The union's general secretary, Nigel de Gruchy, said last

month that up to 100,000 children in ordinary schools were so disruptive that they should be transferred to special schools. The NAS-UWT highlighted its case for a crackdown on classroom discipline last year during disputes in schools including the Ridings, in Halifax, Calderdale and Manton junior school, in Worsley.

Teachers threatened to strike over 60 problem children, while at Manton they called for the exclusion of one pupil. Addressing delegates at the opening of the conference, the incoming

experience has shown that the normal strategies for keeping order in the classroom had gradually come to mean "nought" to an increasing band of youngsters, Mr Ferguson said. "Now, teachers with a superb teaching style, good classroom organisation, the right body language and good voice modulation are finding that the word 'no' is a basis for negotiation with an ever-increasing number of pupils." Protests by NAS-UWT members had proved to be "sensible trade union actions", he said.

Another key theme of the conference will be the workloads being shouldered by classroom teachers. Mr De Gruchy has declared his union will give a new government a year in which to take action to reduce the bureaucracy which is weighing down teachers.

The prime culprit, he says, are time-consuming preparations for inspections by the schools watchdog, Ofsted, and the highly detailed recording and assessment of children's progress demanded under the National Curriculum.

If nothing is done, Mr De Gruchy warns of ballots for industrial actions, including boycott of excess paperwork. Mr Ferguson said teachers were so enslaved by bureaucracy that they had no time for after-school sports clubs and other activities.

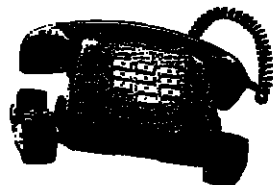
Delegates will vote today on a motion condemning "excessive workload and stress produced by Ofsted inspections". The NUT conference at the weekend demanded the sacking of the chief inspector of schools, Chris Woodhead, and the abolition of Ofsted.

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election countdown

I'll accentuate the positive, promises Blair

Steve Boggan

As positive messages go, you could argue that "Britain Deserves Better" is a little on the negative side.

But there was nothing negative about its delivery yesterday at the start of a Labour poster campaign aimed at dragging the election contest out of the mire of sleaze.

First, there was the location: 18th-century Chilton Park Country House Hotel in Lenham, Kent, where rooms cost up to £210 a night. It was once

owned by Thomas Best, a former Tory MP but is more likely to go down in history as the place where Paula Yates and Michael Hutchence, the rock star, got together behind Bob Geldof's back.

Next, there was the presentation. More than 200 local party supporters and their children were brought together on the hotel's lawn, cheering wildly as Tony Blair arrived to the pop song "Things Can Only Get Better". It was an entrance of which the boxer Nigel Benn would have been proud.

Finally, there were the performances. Mr Blair and his deputy, John Prescott, bursting with enthusiasm, said Labour wanted to raise the tone of the campaign, although Mr Prescott couldn't resist cracking a joke about John Major's inability to bring errant Tories to heel.

"He's gone off to the Happy Easter today," said Mr Prescott. "That's the only place where anyone will take his orders."

Mr Blair said the posters represented the beginning of a cleaner campaign.

"Today is more than the

launch of a poster campaign," he said. "It is an attempt to put some life and energy into a campaign mired in Tory sleaze. Sleaze may hurt the Tories but it hurts politics too."

Surrounded by children wearing T-shirts bearing the campaign slogan, he spelled out the areas where he believed the country deserved better: the economy; the health service; education; employment; old age and safer streets.

"I have issued instructions that all our new posters between now and 1 May, election day,

must be positive," he said. "They will tell the country how we can make Britain better."

"They won't be running our opponents ragged. They won't be decrying them. They won't be engaged in personality politics. They will be saying what we will be doing to make our country better. It is time to rise above the sleaze that has characterised this election campaign so far."

The party faithful enjoyed it, although one or two felt a little uncomfortable with the location and their party's slicker

image. "It makes me feel a little nervous wondering what some old Labour supporters would make of all this," said David Nicholls, 41, a company director from West Malling, Kent.

"On the whole, I think it's good that the party doesn't feel embarrassed by holding functions at this kind of place any more."

But his mother, Helen, 67, wondered what her late father would have made of it all.

"He was a union man from 1945 onwards," she said. "I

wish he could have been here to see this. I'm not sure how he would have reacted. I hope he would have approved."

Mr Blair takes his campaign on the road today with the unveiling of five campaign battle buses leased at a cost of £70,500.

They will take him and a huge entourage of journalists to more than 60 towns and cities across Britain. The Labour leader's bus is equipped with state of the art communications, a kitchen and an office.

It will also feature a re-

tractable platform on which he will deliver speeches and hold question-and-answer sessions with the public. The whole operation has been financed by charging journalists £7,500 each for a ticket.

Aides say Mr Blair, who they consider to be their most potent weapon against Mr Major, will concentrate speeches on what he calls his "Three R's": Reassuring people of the Tories' record; Reassuring people that New Labour is for real; and explaining the Rewards that voting Labour will bring.

Ashdown warned over poor result

Colin Brown

Chief Political Correspondent

Paddy Ashdown's first appearance in a soft focus society magazine could be subtitled "hello...and goodbye" after a helping hand to the exit by Sir Cyril Smith, the former Liberal MP for Rochdale.

Sir Cyril yesterday predicted that Mr Ashdown would step down from the Liberal Democrat leadership if his party failed to make a breakthrough at the general election.

A former Liberal Democrat chief whip, Sir Cyril also warned Mr Ashdown against angling for a seat in a Labour Cabinet. "I don't think there would be any attempt to throw him out but I think he will resign," Mr Smith said on BBC radio.

"I have no quarrel with anything that Paddy has done except his unwillingness to sign the bottom line that he would not sit in a Labour Cabinet."

"If that possibility ever arose, then some of us would be taking action to stop it," he said.

With the Liberal Democrats struggling to stay in double figures in the opinion polls, Mr Smith's prediction of a bleak future for Mr Ashdown is being taken seriously at Westminster. Some Tory ministers are betting that the Liberal Democrats do not increase their number of seats on 1 May.

It came as the Ashdowns looked certain to beat the Blairs and the Majors into *Hello!* magazine. The Liberal Democrat leader, who is soon to become a grandfather, has been invited to join the ranks of Fergie, Gazza and Madonna, who have all been in the glossy publication.

An aide to Mr Ashdown confirmed that the magazine has approached his office asking to do an "at home" piece with his 31-year-old expectant daughter Kate and her French husband Sebastian.

The proposed location of the *Hello!* spread has yet to be determined - whether it be the Ashdowns' rose-clad cottage in the Somerset village of Norton sub Hamdon, or the small

French village where Kate and Sebastian live.

"They have written to Kate, so it is up to her what she wants to do," said a party source.

Mr Ashdown, 56, is planning to visit his daughter in Burgundy in the last days of the election campaign to see her new baby, which is due in about three weeks.

The eldest of the three main party leaders, Mr Ashdown has since denied rumours that he is embarrassed by the idea of becoming a grandfather as it might conflict with his "Action Man" image.

The former Royal Marine has again been enjoying his outdoors profile on the campaign trail in the past week - driving a forklift truck and climbing on to a fire engine.

The party source said: "The baby is not going to be born until quite close to polling day. After that, Kate will have a think about it. They have written to her via the office, but it is her decision. All she's worried about at the moment is the baby."

Big Mac generation opts for conservative approach

The political temperature may have been raised several degrees by the latest sleaze scandals but many young people feel distinctly cool about the prospect of voting for anyone, according to a selected group of first-time voters.

A number of the *Independent* group, members of the so-called Big Mac Generation, born when the ubiquitous hamburger had just appeared on British high streets, will not bother to support any party at all, reflecting their indifference to the political process.

University student Robert Bishop, 19, who like all the sample of young voters lives in the marginal seat of Redditch, says he has made up his mind to abstain. "They [the parties] are just different shades of grey. I think a lot of young people feel this way."

Andrew Davies, 19, a sixth-former at Arrow Vale school in Redditch, said he would still be reading newspapers and watching the election coverage on television, but felt "resigned" to not voting.

"It seems to me the parties are more interested in sniping at each other than putting anything positive forward."

First-time voters are unimpressed by the election campaign, writes Michael Streeter

"I think the sleaze issue is going to drag on, and that does not make any of them look good."

Another college student, Richard Watson, 19, admitted he was interested in the way the media was covering the election, especially the drift of newspapers away from the Conservative Party. But he said he, too, would "probably" not vote despite listening to many of the arguments.

Ian Wright, 19, a floor manager at McDonald's, says he is undecided and has found the campaign so far "boring". "I think most people I know has found it like that - nothing has caught the imagination. I'm looking forward to seeing a head-to-head debate, which may help me decide. Hopefully they will not be able to dodge the questions."

When first interviewed by *The Independent* last year Alice Melvin, 21, who works in a bet-

ting shop, had considered voting Green, but has now drifted towards the Conservatives. "I just feel that things in the economy are going okay, and will a change under Labour do any good for us? In the end, I'm not sure I'll vote at all."

Among those who have decided to vote, there is more comfort for John Major than Tony Blair, suggesting that alongside a sense of general disillusionment with conventional politics, much of the younger generation has a largely conservative approach to society.

Rachel Pitt, 18, who is at North East Worcester College, Redditch, who had previously been undecided, had now opted to vote for the Tories.

She said her mind had been made up by Labour's talk of ending the universality of child benefit. "I do not agree with that," she said. "I know that the Conservatives said last time that they would not put up taxes and they did - but I think Labour will do the same."

Tom Hainsshaw, 18, another pupil at "fairly definite" he will vote Conservative but will watch some of the televised debates. "I will vote but I'm not terribly excited by the campaign."



Down to earth: Swampy launching his manifesto at Manchester airport yesterday

Photograph: Tom Pilstori

Swampy scales political heights

Simon Reeve

The prospect of Swampy the prospective parliamentary candidate arose yesterday as the anti-roads campaigner launched his own 10-point political manifesto at the site of the proposed second runway for Manchester airport.

In an opening stunt unlikely to be repeated by other aspiring politicians, Swampy emerged from a hole 50ft up a cliff and addressed the ground to explain his philosophy to reporters, photographers and supporters.

Swampy, whose real name is Daniel Hooper, then announced that he would be calling his party Never Mind The Ballots, and would be standing at the general election against Graham Stringer, the Labour party candidate for Manchester Blackley and chairman of Manchester Airport plc.

Wearing a green rosette and a tunnelling lamp attached to his head, and standing at the entrance to a tunnel under the runway site, Swampy said he wanted to put the environment first: "My message to Mr Stringer is stand down, you don't stand a chance. I aim to be prime minister one day."

It was a dramatic intervention by Britain's most famous eco-warrior. "Nobody should underestimate the level of support he has, particularly among the young," one of his followers said as other tunnellers shouted: "Vote for Swampy - he's the man for the job."

The protesters have already managed to delay by two weeks a High Court action to remove them from the site. Buoyed by success, Swampy now says he wants to put up candidates across the country.

His 'Don't Fly, Don't Drive' manifesto includes policies to stop internal flights, introduce targets for traffic reduction, stop airport expansion, tax parking and increase rail freight. Although the date of the announcement is significant, according to Andrew Wood, a spokesman for the protesters, nomination papers have been obtained and could be submitted if money was found to put down a deposit.

"What I would like to appeal for is help with the £500 deposit to enable me to run as parliamentary candidate and to any fat-walleted sympathiser I promise to give my utmost best in my election campaign," Swampy said.



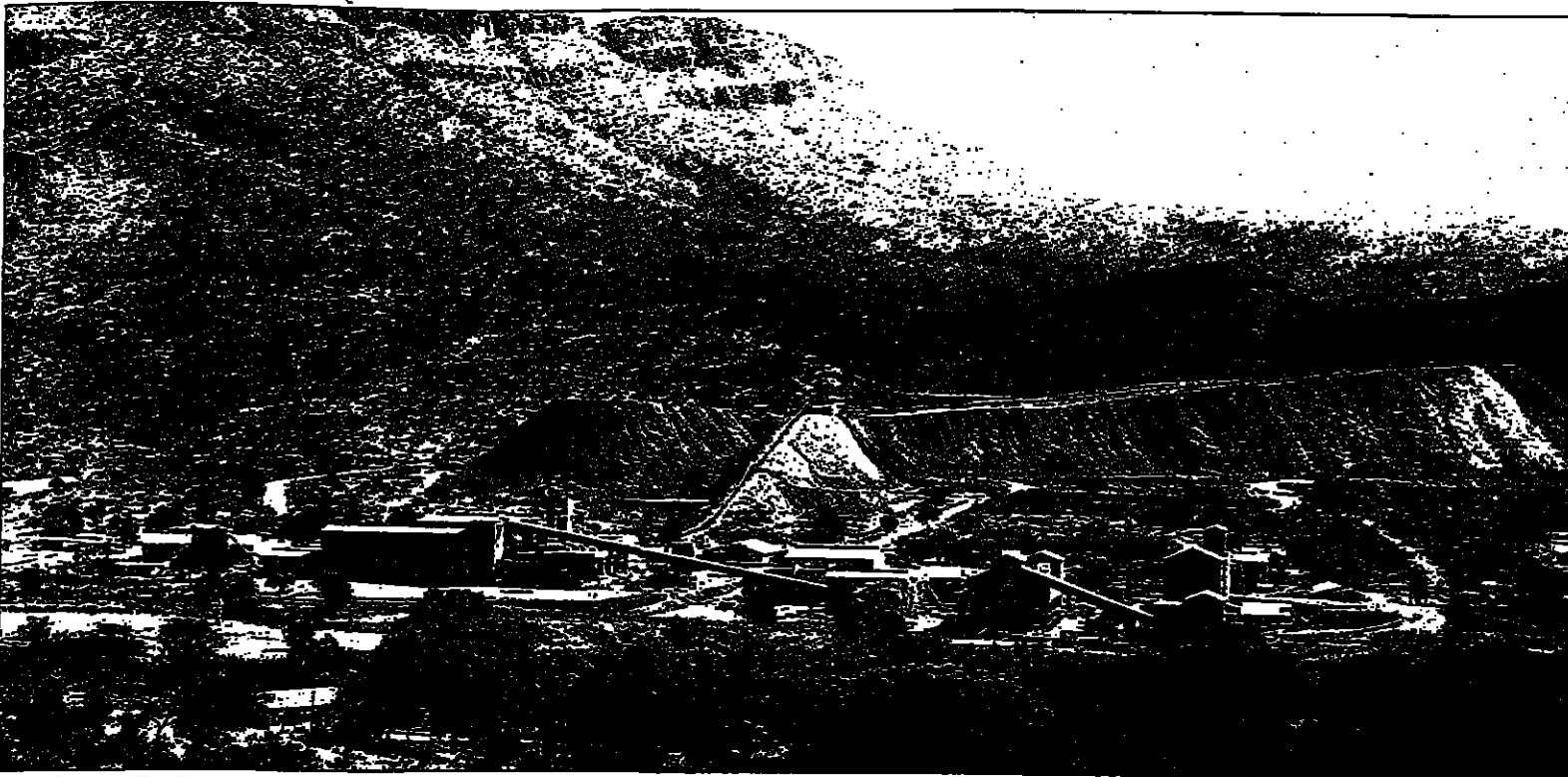
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news

South African factory staff sue British firms



Risk factor: The Penge asbestos mine run by Cape's subsidiary in South Africa, which workers claim failed to protect them from lethal fibres

Black workers are claiming damages for death and injury from industrial poisoning, reports Ian Burrell

Two dozen black workers from southern Africa are set to give evidence in London against British companies which they say poisoned them with asbestos and mercury.

Two workers have died from mercury poisoning and hundreds from asbestos-related diseases after working at plants set up by British firms. In three separate legal actions, the companies are accused of allowing their subsidiaries to flout safety standards which would have been required in the United Kingdom.

A claim for damages will be served this week on Cape plc, of Middlesex, by solicitors acting for workers at asbestos mines run by the company's subsidiary in South Africa. Employees from the Penge mine in north-east Transvaal will produce evidence that children under 12 were made to trample asbestos and pack it into bags while bosses with whips watched over them.

The workers, who were paid £1 a week in the immediate

post-war years, later died or became seriously ill from asbestos-related diseases. They allege that Cape was fully aware of the dangers of the material from 1931 when Britain's Asbestos Regulations were introduced to reduce exposure to potentially deadly fibres.

In South Africa, it is alleged, the company continued to expose its subsidiary company's black workforce to fibre levels at least 35 times as high as British limits. Asbestos-related cancer takes between 15 and 50 years to appear and victims are still being identified.

As part of the same action, two Afrikaner families living near an asbestos mill at Prieska in the north-west Cape, are also seeking damages from Cape plc. Studies have shown that 14 per cent of deaths in the town are from mesothelioma, a form of cancer only caused by asbestos.

Cape said that it pulled out of South Africa in 1979 and its present business had nothing to do with asbestos. The company's lawyers are preparing a response to the action.

Next October, 20 black South African workers and relatives of dead employees are set to fly to London to give evidence against Thor Chemicals Holdings Ltd, of Margate, Kent, which they accuse of exposing them to potentially lethal doses of mercury.

The workers, who are Zulu-speaking, claim that they were given no safety training and were allowed to eat food on the floor of the plant in Cato Ridge, Natal. In 1992, two workers died from mercury poisoning. Actions against Thor were started by their families and 18 other workers, two more of whom have since died.

Thor's lawyers have fought to stop the cases being heard in Britain but the company declined to speak about the case.

A separate case brought against RTZ, the London-based multinational, by a former worker at the company's Namibian uranium mine, will go before the House of Lords this month, when a decision will be made on whether it should be heard in Britain. Edward Connelly, now of Glasgow, alleges that the company breached safety standards in exposing him to uranium dust. He has throat cancer and can no longer work. RTZ, which strongly denies responsibility, believes the case should be heard in Namibia.

Richard Meenan, of the London solicitors Leigh Day, said: "These British companies are inevitably responsible for the design of technology and systems of work and have the power and duty to ensure that people are not injured. We are dealing with wholly owned subsidiaries here."

'I was given no warning by anyone'

All day long they stepped. Small black children, covered from head to foot in large shipping bags, tramping down deadly asbestos for their British bosses. As the fluffy amosite asbestos cascaded on to their heads, a supervisor kept them marching with the crack of his whip.

Watching the children, some of whom were under 12 years old, was a South African government medical official, Dr Gerrit Schepers, who recorded what he saw: "I believe these children to have had the ultimate of asbestos dust exposure. X-ray revealed several to have radiologic asbestos [asbestosis] before the age of 12."

Writing in 1949, Dr Schepers was a visitor to the Penge asbestos mine, which British entrepreneurs set up in north-east Transvaal after the discovery of amosite outcrops in 1907. The price of extracting the mineral is still being paid in death and injury, 90 years later.

This week a claim for damages is being made by three former black workers of the Penge mining company (Egnep) against its British parent, Cape plc. All three have asbestosis and claim that Cape ignored British safety standards and exposed the black South African workforce at Penge to deadly levels of suffocating fibres.

Matlaweng Mohlala, now 58, experienced similar conditions to those described by Dr Schepers. He was employed at 12 and spent 14 years packing asbestos fibre into sacks with his bare hands. He said his employers gave him no warning about the dangers.

"None at all by anybody," he said. "No gloves, boots or any protective clothing was supplied. I was X-rayed on engagement and discharge at Penge but not told anything was wrong."

Mr Mohlala now has a permanent burning in his chest, struggles to breathe and cannot work. Yet back in Britain, the dangers of asbestos had been known for more than a generation.

Graphs produced by Cape itself show that asbestos dust levels in the Penge factory were 12 to 35 times higher than permitted levels in Britain. In 1979 the mine was finally closed, but the problems remain. Medical researchers found that 80 per cent of black Penge miners who died between 1959 and 1964 had asbestosis. Their average age of the men was 43.

Cape's operations have also incurred the wrath of rural Afrikaners living close to its plants. While Matlaweng Mohlala was packing brown asbestos by hand in Penge, Mattheys Nel was a teenager, breathing in blue asbestos fibres in Prieska in the north-west Cape.

Researchers from the National Centre for Occupational Health found that 14 per cent of deaths in the town were from mesothelioma, a cancer caused by asbestos. Mr Nel died from mesothelioma in 1995 even though he never worked at the Prieska mill, which was closed down in 1964. His brother and mother also died from the disease.

Two years earlier in a private

report the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research said that "an alarmingly high number of cases with mesothelioma have been discovered among people who live or who have lived in the north-western Cape area and there is evidence to suggest that this condition is associated with an exposure to asbestos dust inhalation".

The Nel family is claiming damages from Cape, along with Rachel Lubbe, 57, who is still alive but has mesothelioma.

Because the South African mining industry has few white workers it has had less union representation than other industries – and worse safety standards. It was not until 1954 that South African workers were given any regulatory protection against asbestos and

Mercury staff 'were poisoned'

In 1987 Thor closed its mercury plant in Margate, Kent. There had been repeated inquiries by the Health and Safety Executive into the high levels of mercury being absorbed by workers. The chemicals company no longer makes mercury-based products.

In Cato Ridge, Natal, however, the company's subsidiary Thor Chemicals SA expanded its mercury reprocessing operation, using technology developed in Britain.

Workers from South Africa who will seek damages in the High Court in London next October allege that they were not warned of the potential dangers of their job. In statements, they say that when the mercury levels in their urine reached dangerous levels they were told to "have a few beers" by the management.

In 1982 workers say they realised something was seriously wrong. They began to hallucinate and show other symptoms of mercury poisoning. Peter Cele, 21, died after six months in hospital. Englebert Ngcobe, 54, died after three years. Both their families are suing Thor. The company is also being sued by 18 other workers and the relatives of two others who have since died.

But Richard Meenan, a solicitor with Leigh Day, of London, who are representing the plaintiffs, said: "The British companies cannot hide behind the fact that they had no regulations in South Africa. That does not give them a licence to totally disregard hazardous dust levels."

Michael Pitt-Payne, Cape plc's company secretary, said Cape had pulled out of South Africa in 1979 and no longer used asbestos in its products. "We sold the companies that were doing the mining in South Africa in 1979 and as such we have got very few people here who had anything to do with the business at the time." He said the action was in the hands of the company's lawyers and he did not wish to comment further.

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Springtime thaw softens hard edge of the lethal season

It has been a restless and fretful winter, and we will all be glad to see it end. Moscow has been seized by an unsettling climatic fever, a cycle of freezing and melting. A month ago it seemed to be spring, but then we were buried anew beneath a carpet of snow. Yesterday, after a weekend in which the heavens dumped four more inches on us, another thaw began.

Russians believe wildly oscillating temperatures are bad for the health because they cause flu, colds, and other nasty bugs to breed, although these seem to flourish no matter what the thermometer says. My complaint is of a different kind: for five months, two pairs of sec-

ond-hand cross-country skis have been sitting in the corner of our hall, the consequences of a brief flurry of determination finally to get fit.

It was going to be a wonderful winter, my wife and I told ourselves last autumn. At weekends we were going to drive out of Moscow to an old and peeling dacha which we share with friends and spend hours gliding effortlessly around the countryside, rejoicing in a fairy-tale landscape covered by powder snow.

After a month or two, we would no longer need to use the rickety lift that conveys us up to the ninth floor of our high-rise Moscow apartment block, but

would be bounding up the staircase on our new, lean, skiing legs. Wobbly jaw lines and unconvincing bottoms would vanish like a May frost.

All this must now wait. It took us weeks to equip ourselves, not least because cross-country ski boots proved astonishingly hard to find; in an odd inversion of the laws of supply and demand, these are easily acquired in the summer, but seem to disappear from Moscow's shelves when the snow arrives. What with that, and the erratic weather, we have used the skis only twice.

Russians love cross-country skiing. It is deemed to be one of the pleasures of living in this hostile climate. They will en-

MOSCOW DAYS

those about it with the same passion that they apply to hunting, ice-fishing and figure skating.

Yet, for all the disappointment at this year's poor conditions, I feel compelled to admit my brief excursions into the snowfields unlocked few of its mysterious delights; on the first, we trudged for about 500 yards into the woods, discovered we were exhausted, and walked home; on the second, I was with a colleague who was so much fitter and more agile than me that he grew tired of being held back and took off into the distance.

After marvelling at the spectacular woodlands – pines and silver birches engulfed by the hush of a fresh fall of snow – I also grew bored. Where's the sport in sliding slowly across a dead flat landscape? The skis seemed far too thin; the snow, too deep; my legs, too fat.

Next year, I have a new plan: amazingly, given that Moscow is mostly flat, you can go downhill skiing in several places in the middle of the city. Just along from Gorky Park, 10 minutes' drive from my home, the land falls down a few hundred yards

towards the river Moskva. For a modest fee, downhillers can tinkle up and down the hill using a small ski tow.

True, this is not St Moritz or even Aviemore, but its pleasures are more to the commanding view across the river and towards the Kremlin than to speed or exercise. But at least it is a pastime which has the merit of being fairly safe.

That is more than can be said about winter here in general. We have had our share of routine accidents – this weekend, three fishermen died when they fell into the sea where their ice foe broke up in a storm; this year, 1,066 people in Moscow alone have been treated for

frostbite, while countless more have been injured by falling over on ice, and 57 froze to death.

Goodness knows how many road accidents can be blamed on the weather; the roads, which are poorly marked and pot-holed at the best of times, are covered with an icy mucus, a mixture of salt and slush. Moscow does its best to keep the streets cleared. It sends out a snow-clearing lorry known to locals as "the Capitalist" because of its ability to suck up everything around it. But driving outside town is a nightmare.

There are also some particularly nasty unexpected perils. News broke this week of a 22-year-old student who, in a land-

mark case, is bringing criminal negligence charges against the Moscow city authorities after an enormous icicle came crashing down from a five-storey building, and killed her mother as she was walking in the street.

This will probably not be the last tragedy of its kind. This year the cycle of thaws and freezes has produced a particularly large crop of icicles – there were two six-footers hanging like sharks' teeth from the roof of the dacha yesterday, which occasionally shifted, giving off a loud rumble and providing another reason for us all to wish for an end to this lethal season.

Phil Reeves

Russia gets tough with tax dodgers

Phil Reeves
Moscow

The billboards around Moscow make the point as clearly as anyone can. A smooth young man in a suit glares out at the world. Like Uncle Sam, he is making a passionate appeal to the nation's patriotic impulses, although he points not with his finger but with a mobile phone. "I have submitted mine," says the logo. "Have you?"

Today is the deadline for Russians to hand in their personal income tax returns. For the nation's beleaguered treasurers it is a decisive moment, an opportunity to discover if the government has made any progress with a massive campaign to bring an end to an epidemic of tax-dodging.

The problem is one of the country's gravest economic malaises, spoiling efforts to switch to free market economics, and souring its relationship with its lenders at the International

Monetary Fund. Tax experts estimate that only about half the country's personal earnings yield income tax, adding to a revenue collection crisis that has reduced budget forecasts to gibberish. The rest of the cash swirls around illegally in the large black economy.

This year, the government has gone to unprecedented lengths, bombarding the 148 million population with intimidating television advertisements. One shows a man caught in the cross-hairs of a telescopic sight. "The choice is yours," growls the announcer.

Alarming footage has been screened showing the tax police's 500-strong Swat team in action. Their equipment includes grenades, tear gas, AK47 assault rifles, mountaineers and snipers are among their ranks. True, they are normally used to pursue mafia-run businesses and other non-paying companies, rather than individuals. But that is beside the point. The



Payment due: Mikhail Polyakov, head of the tax police's 500-strong Swat unit, flanked by an officer in full regalia

Photograph: Igor Tabakov/Moscow Times

cash-starved authorities are quite happy to scare the public into coming clean.

Tax gathering in Russia is no easy task. Last year – when Russia managed to raise only about two-thirds of taxes – 26 tax officials were killed and 74 wounded in the line of duty.

Several dozen have had their homes burned down, and at least one was kidnapped.

The violence is a result of a running war between the tax authorities and non-paying corporations. (These owe billions; half of all Russia's overdue tax is owed by only 73 enterprises.)

But it deepens the rift in a country where the federal authorities are seen as inept and corrupt.

Distrust of officialdom is a central part of the problem. In a recent survey by the Russian Marketing Research Company, 61 per cent agreed that tax evasion is not a crime. "One of the

greatest sources of this was the amount of money that the government spent on the military in Chechnya," said Peter Reinhardt, personal tax manager with Ernst & Young in Moscow.

Broadly, the top rate of income tax is 35 per cent, which kicks in for those earning

above \$8,500 (£5,312) a year. Average wages are closer to \$1,800, which is taxed at 12 per cent. VAT is at 20 per cent.

Those who lie on their tax returns, or fail to submit them, face penalties ranging from a fine which equals their tax debt, plus interest, or – for repeat offenders – a jail sentence of up to three years.

The Swat teams do not help. "They tend to come through the front door and put a revolver up the receptionist's left nostril, no matter what kind of business they are dealing with," said one Western analyst. "It's not very nice."

Workers bid farewell to the doomed yards of Gdansk



Julia Kaminsky
Gdansk

The monument to the shipyard workers of Gdansk bears three anchors, to symbolise hope. But hope is in short supply as the shipyard, birthplace of Solidarity, is finally being closed after 17 years of financial problems and attempted restructuring.

The Polish government is mulling about a deal to save the yard, involving a joint programme with the profitable Szczecin shipyards, but the future looks bleak.

After being threatened with closure in 1980, then again in 1988, the Gdansk yards were revived, to limp along during the early Nineties while their champion, Lech Walesa, was President of the Republic.

Mr Walesa returned to work in the shipyard briefly when he lost the presidential elections in 1995, but his time there was short-lived. He went back to work, he said, because without a presidential pension, he had no money to support his family of eight children. After this stunt, the government passed a new law allowing for ex-presidents to receive a pension. Now he spends his time between the Lech Walesa Institute, where he gives interviews, lecture tours abroad, and the new house he is building in Warsaw's exclusive Oliva district.

An air of resignation hangs over the town as the remaining 3,800 men are given their cards and prepare to search for jobs. But resignation is the preserve of the townsfolk. The workers are angry, as evidenced by the

daily protests in the past weeks, not only in this port but throughout Poland.

At the Lenin yard, Wojciech Kowalczyk is clocking in for his final shift, as he waits to be laid off the following day. "They said they would reconstruct Gdansk for the city's millennium this year," he says, "but this is what they meant. This is their gift to us. The yard could stay open if only we had support."

Mr Kowalczyk has been a locksmith at the yard since he left school, and earns 700 zloty a month (£140) for a 55-hour week. He will receive no redundancy pay. The local job agency says there are nearly 1,500 jobs vacant in the region – a figure disputed by Solidarity – but none of them is related to the shipping industry. "I don't know what I will do now," Mr Kowalczyk says. "There is no work, and I am angry."

The announcement of the shipyard's closure was extremely bad timing: simultaneously, the "Order of the White Eagles" – a medal of honour – was being awarded by President Aleksander Kwasniewski to Mieczyslaw Rakowski, the former prime minister who tried in vain to close the Lenin yard in 1988. "The President is trying to destroy people," said the widow of a shipyard worker. "Rakowski gets a medal, while we go to the unemployment office."

On the other side of the tram lines, workers whose shifts are over cram into small, smoke-filled bars. One, nearing 65, is worried about his pension. "I'm due to retire," he says. "I don't know whether my pension



Rioting in Gdansk in the 1980s (above left) and workers now reading Solidarity papers

is secure. But at least I don't have to worry about work. It's the young men I feel sorry for. Another rails at Lech Walesa, sparking a fierce argument. "Walesa has abandoned us. I was at school with him, but he has forgotten us. He is a pig. Anyway, he is nothing now. He is just a small man."

They are angry at what they see as a political move to crush the yard by the government, which is largely composed of former communists, and with the bank which denied them a crucial loan to fulfil orders for five ships.

But the protests in Gdansk have been a muted affair, poorly attended by the public, in spite of their sympathy for the men. At a special mass at St Brigitte's Church held by Fr Henryk Jankowski, a high-profile priest known in the West for his anti-Semitic views, the ageing congregation fills the collection plates with money for the workers. Stanislaw Kaczmarek, 70, has come to pray for them. "I pray daily that the yard won't close," he says. "I live near here, and I remember everything that happened in 1970. I saw it all." As Poland shuffles ever nearer to the European Union, all sorts of jobs are in

danger, not just those of the shipyard workers. Since the Eighties the yard has been a financial liability, but no one has managed to close it because it has never been free of political symbolism.

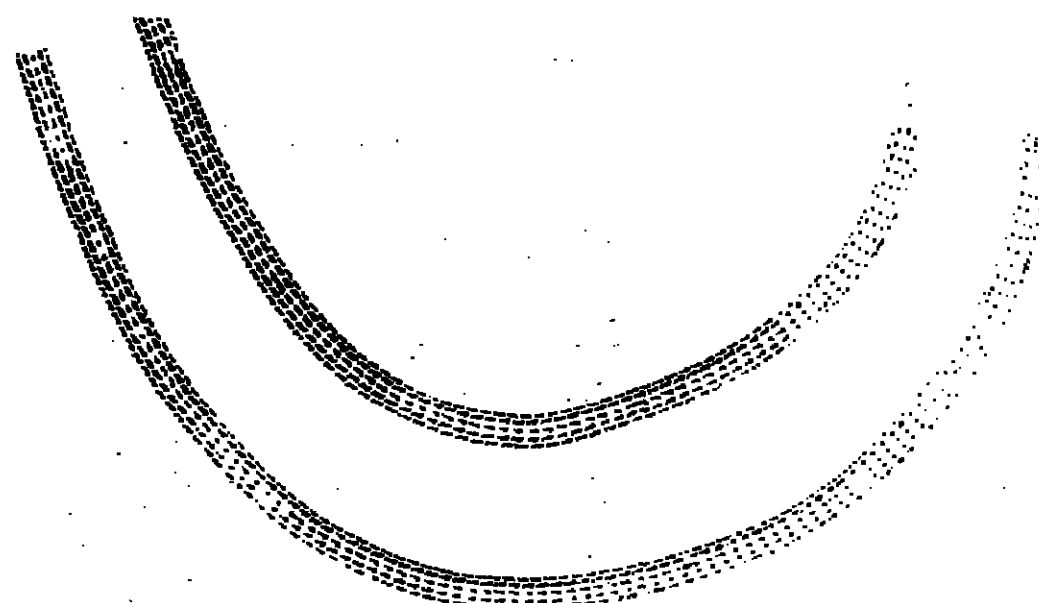
The yard's director, appointed in 1995, was given until 28 February this year to save the yard, or sell it. Its book value is \$88m (£55m), but one reputed offer was for as little as \$20m.

Now, the only real hope is a slim one: that a deal can be forged with the Gdynia yard 32km up the coast and the Szczecin yard 300km away. Gdynia has a full order book until mid-1998, and will deliver 12 vessels worth \$400m this year. The proposal would involve bank loans to finance production of five ships for a Polish company, Polska Zegluga Morska, which would provide work for 2,000 of the 3,800 workers. Analysts are sceptical. They say the proposal would endanger Szczecin's strong position, and that without deadlines and guarantees, it would be nothing more than a state subsidy with political motives.

In the meantime, the workers and Solidarity will continue protesting.

WHY WAIT TILL TODAY

TO HAVE A LAUGH?



APR 1 1997

international

Rebels advance as Kinshasa's rich party on

Ed O'Loughlin
Kinshasa

Rebels are advancing in the east, Western troops are lurking across the river, and in town one of the President's closest allies has just denounced him, yet in Zaire's plundered capital of Kinshasa life goes on with an air of surreal normality.

While most Western diplomats have already written off President Mobutu Sese Seko's prospects for political survival, the bought politicians and corrupt businessmen who have benefited most from his 32-year reign continue to live out the good life, apparently indifferent to the impending storm.

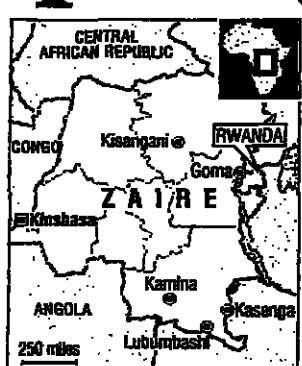
Yesterday brought reports of the fall of Kamina, 400 miles north-west of Lubumbashi, the capital of Shaba province in the south-eastern copperbelt, and the next declared target of the rebel leader, Laurent Kabila. On Saturday the rebels took Kasenga, another key town to the north-west of Lubumbashi, while ex-prime minister Jean Nguza A. Karl-Bond sought his way out of the city.

For many wealthy Kinshasans, however, the weekend was another opportunity for golf or tennis, or a chance to shop at the Intercontinental Hotel's expensive boutiques.

On Sunday the foreign press corps, fed up with two weeks waiting for the end to come, dined on tools for a game of cricket against the Indian Embassy. It caught well the *fin de siècle* mood.

"The political class in Kinshasa is dancing on a volcano, but they don't care," said one Western diplomat. "They keep their bank accounts overseas, and last week a lot of them sent their Mercedes across the river to the Congo."

Even the ordinary people of Kinshasa, who have helped government troops to pillage the city twice since 1991, seem caught up in the fatalistic mood. Two weeks ago the fall of Kinsangani, 1,300km to the east, set the capital abuzz with rumours of imminent coups and outbreaks



Laurent Kabila: Town after town falling to his rebels

of looting. Western diplomats now believe these fears have receded – for the time being.

The presence of 2,000 troops from Belgium, France and the United States just across Congo River in Brazzaville is believed to have reduced the likelihood of a fresh outbreak of street violence. As for political insurrection, most Kinshasans seem to want rid of the Mobutists but are willing to leave the job to someone else.

"We don't know that Kabila will be any better, but we know we need a change," said Alphonse, a driver by trade. "Thirty years of Mobutu is much too long – the bosses have taken all the wealth of the country, and we have nothing. Kabila will be very welcome if he comes, but we will wait and see what happens."

The calm in Kinshasa may reflect a dangerous delusion in Mobutist circles. One Western

diplomat claims that there are still politicians and soldiers in Kinshasa who believe Mr Mobutu can pull off an escape act, that France might still come to their aid, that the rebellion is merely an invasion by Rwandan Tutsis – even that Zaire's unpaid demoralised bandit army can still save the day.

Some observers believe that, despite President Mobutu's illness, his regime is playing for time, hoping to put off real negotiations with Mr Kabila's rebels until after a ceasefire is somehow imposed by the international community. There are rumours that he may reinstate veteran opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi as prime minister, in an attempt to split the opposition.

But beyond the heavily guarded confines of Mr Mobutu's Tshikapa palace few people believe that time is on his side. Prostate cancer has destroyed his health, and this week Kinshasans were recalling again his promises that "Zaire will have a late president, but never an ex-president". The jury is out on the prediction: in the east Mr Kabila has already symbolically reinstated Patrice Lumumba's leftist Congo Republic, replaced by Mr Mobutu's Zaire following a 1965 coup.

The rebel advance is pushing towards the main diamond and copper mining centres of Mbuji-Mayi and Lubumbashi, source of most of his regime's wealth and power. Diplomats believe that, denied access to his revenue, Mr Mobutu's regime will collapse without any need for further military action.

"Kinshasa has to fall from the inside," said one Western diplomat. "For the rebels to come here is too far and too complicated."

Few people, Zairean or otherwise, believe now as they did a few months ago that a rebel victory will cause Zaire to splinter immediately along ethnic or provincial fault lines. Instead, with city after city clamouring for Mr Kabila to come and liberate them, the man once reviled for breaking the nation is now being asked to unify it.



Cold comfort: Members of the German Rescue Society diving into the 5C waters of the Mittelland canal in western Germany during an event at the weekend marking the opening of the summer season. They cross the 30m canal twice Photograph: AFP

Hong Kong still worth a gamble

Stephen Vines
Hong Kong

Schizophrenia is setting in. At any rate, this is the diagnosis proffered by some well-meaning friends. They fear that my work for this newspaper and my business interests are moving fast in different directions.

Let me explain: I think I am the only foreign correspondent in Hong Kong to have started a business here. It is a food related business, because I believe in the old maxim that whatever happens, people have to eat.

This year, the year in which China takes over the colony, I and my partners, the majority of whom are Chinese, will be doubling the size of the business and investing a great deal of money to do so.

Meanwhile, I spend my time hunched over a computer keyboard punching out stories

about the uncertainties surrounding the return to Chinese rule, the dangers posed by various changes and generally reflecting what may be described as a rather pessimistic outlook.

Surely, therefore, I should be scrambling to liquidate my financial interests and ferret what can be salvaged back to a safe bank account in Blighty. How can I justify casting doubt on what China describes as "the Glorious Return to the Motherland" without acting on the logic of this view?

Believe me, I do think about this. However, I feel that my mindset is now similar to that of most of the Chinese people around me. They, too, must take some significant decisions about where to keep their assets, and more importantly, where to keep themselves. Many decide that security can only be guaranteed by leaving and starting a new life overseas. The majority stay, including those with the

means to quit. They do so not necessarily because they believe all the guff about returning to the motherland but because when they do their sums they discover they will be far better off in Hong Kong than in the low-growth economies of the West.

My partners and I have done our sums and, accordingly, have taken the plunge into new investment. We reckon we will make a good return. None of us is under the illusion that we're not taking a risk, probably greater than the type of risk businessmen would take elsewhere.

Only a fool would ignore the possibility that everything could go horribly wrong, meaning we could literally lose every penny. One of my partners was brought up in China during the Cultural Revolution. Experience the potential madness of the Chinese system is a salutary reminder of what could happen. However, the upside, con-

tained in the figures predicting what sort of money we could make, seems to indicate that the rewards justify the risk.

Here's the rub. I imagine that our calculations are much the same as those being made by a host of other people here in Hong Kong. We are all balancing risk and reward. Some may be more bullish and confidently assert that the rewards outweigh the risks. I would not go that far, preferring the cautious assessment that the rewards justify the risk. The laws of commerce are no different here than elsewhere, meaning that the greater the risk, the greater the reward.

Once this is understood, it becomes clear why the local stock market is booming, why property prices retain their steady upward climb and why money is not leaving these tiny shores in shiploads. It also helps to explain why survey after survey shows that people are confident

about the future. The truth is that we are all ensnared in a conspiracy of confidence. We have taken a gamble by investing in Hong Kong and would be foolish to go around saying that we've taken the gamble on a place with foundations which are about to crumble.

Outsiders, but no one here, might wonder whether these strictures apply just to fat-cat capitalists and aspirant fat-cat capitalists. The question can only be asked by those who do not understand Hong Kong.

The reason Hong Kong works is that few people believe that they, or at least their children, have no chance of getting rich. The culture of low expectations is non-existent here. Even the poor keep an eye on the stock market and are familiar with the currency markets. They, too, want to take a gamble on the future and will do so, given half a chance.

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British Midland

THE World of Lily Wong by LARRY FEIGN © 1997



China boasts of record on rights

Teresa Poole
Peking

China, which insists it has no political prisoners, yesterday admitted 2,026 people were in jail for "counter-revolutionary" crimes. Zhang Xufu, Vice-Minister of Justice, said: "In China, counter-revolutionary prisoners are not political prisoners, they are prisoners who have endangered national security... or have conducted activities to overthrow the political power of China."

The distinction is largely academic for the families of those who have been locked away. Relatives of Wang Dan, the former student leader who last year was sentenced to 11 years for subversion, say he is suffering from stomach, throat and prostate problems. Mr Zhang insisted the prisoner was in good health, and "even joined a singing contest in prison".

There was little evidence yesterday, as China published its annual White Paper on its own human rights record, of the "more receptive" stance US vice-president Al Gore said he witnessed last week when raising the subject with China's leaders. Peking has been buoyed by France's decision not

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Could Labour master the mandarins?

It's odd how, despite being hand-bagged by Margaret Thatcher and battered in the service of Tory ministers who have been deserted by their sense of proportion and parliamentary propriety, the mandarinate retains its mystique. Former permanent secretaries are feted with hardly a backward glance at their departmental stewardship. The conduct of schools, prisons, abattoirs and child support offices, let alone exchange-rate decisions, are never held to be the responsibility of the advice-givers of Whitehall – those eminent public servants who, as we reported yesterday, fear that Tory reforms to Whitehall have gone too far, debilitating the machine.

Meanwhile, important relationships remain deliberately shrouded. Column inches are expended on speculation about who might succeed Sir Robin Butler as head of the Civil Service and Cabinet Secretary, but nobody bothers to ask with whom Sir Robin has a contract of employment, indeed whether he has one at all, let alone what are the performance criteria that might, say, win him a bonus. In other words, for all the effort expended on managerial reform inside central government over recent years, the higher Civil Service has been gone unexamined and so unchanged.

Whoever wins the election, they will on 2 May inherit a Whitehall machine that is part-reformed and so only part-modernised. Aspects of its work remain

mysterious – that word is apposite in a constitutional set-up that obfuscates the sources and exercise of power as a matter of course.

But the system works. By and large, policies get implemented. Efficiency has, in some areas, demonstrably increased. The Conservatives deserve credit for having asked sharp questions about operations. Why, asked Michael Heseltine as long ago as 1980, do we not know what departmental officials do, let alone how much they cost? The Financial Management Initiative of the early Eighties provided some answers. Why, asked a White Paper in 1988, is Whitehall management so amateur? The establishment of executive agencies to administer passports and licences began to supply a remedy. But the Conservatives fumbled equally pressing questions, to do with the architecture of Whitehall: why do we have all these departments pursuing such anachronistic purposes? The débacle in the running of prisons was not principally Michael Howard's fault; it was the fault of a Cabinet that refused to address the problem of professional service management under amateur ministers.

On winning, Labour would thus inherit a machine, some of whose parts are running better than ever, but one that has managed to duck big questions about power and responsibility. Signs are that Labour has done little thinking in detail about where it wants to take

reform. Instead, as power has beckoned, we have seen the hoariest of left-of-centre anxieties getting trotted out. Like the one about the mandarins' embrace. It is as if Tony Benn were still politically alive, and permanent secretaries were a kind of fifth column out to seduce Labour ministers away from the true socialist faith.

The gist of the advice tendered to would-be Labour ministers yesterday in a Fabian pamphlet by Peter Hennessy was "Shape up and tell the civil servants what to do, firmly, and they will." Such schooling is welcome, if only to dispel any lingering nonsense about the higher

Civil Service having been corrupted by serving the Tories for all these long years. Labour has more to worry about in the intellectual bankruptcy of senior officials than from their loyal service to the Tories – in certain policy areas, such as Europe, jobs and social policy, Whitehall has become a desert of knowledge and ideas. But the main point is that a clear distinction needs to be made between civil servants as partisans of the party in office and the fact that civil servants draw their identity from obliging the present holders of power – ministers. The Scott report on arms to Iraq, and the equally informa-

tive if tendentious memoir by Derek Lewis of his 1,000 days at the head of the Prison Service, tell of civil servants who are not employed to make moral or political distinctions. Their task is to sustain power, which for practical purposes means their ministers.

Whether this professional dedication is admirably directed is a different question from whether Labour ministers might benefit from it. They certainly could. If Labour wins the election, it can either utilise the machine as it is, or seek to reform it while simultaneously governing according to its new priorities.

Some reform will be forced on it willy-nilly. It is hard to see Labour's spending commitments being delivered by the Treasury as presently constituted, just as it is hard to see Tony Blair failing to balance his position against the Treasury by beefing up No 10. Similarly, Labour's commitment to devolution of power to Scotland and Wales will force Whitehall changes. But beyond that? Does Labour plan to govern with civil servants whose culture and reflexes contributed, in those events and procedures so painstakingly described in the Scott report, to the amorality which is now surfacing as "sleaze"?

Civil servants would prove as adept at the black arts under Labour as under the Tories. Labour, however, appears friendly toward the emerging formal code of Civil Service conduct,

is thinking about incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights, is warm towards parliamentary reform and freedom of information. All those could weaken the old loyalty of civil servant and minister and, temporarily at least, leave Labour ministers less adept in the exercise of power.

It is a conundrum on which Mr Blair and his colleagues have spent little mental energy, mainly because they think it matters less than knowing what they want, and getting on with it. They ought to think more carefully, because if they are not sure what they want (and they aren't, entirely), Labour ministers may find that the inhabitants of Whitehall are less help than they hope.

A small victory for Rutland

Welcome back, Rutland. (Though, of course, you never really went away.) What lessons can we draw from your inhabitants' long refusal to accept incorporation into Leicestershire? Simple, really. One, don't mess with other people's sense of their own identity; they know a lot more about it than you do. Two, small is not necessarily beautiful. In Rutland, perhaps; but in the centre of any of our larger conurbations, it most certainly is not.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Yes, sleaze is the real election issue

Sir: Even your leading article "For democracy's sake, sack him" (31 March) follows the line that sleaze is a distraction from the main election issues. I find that a bizarre reading of a bizarre campaign.

The issue in this election is accountability, in a great range of forms. Is Westminster government free to refuse the constraint of full partnership in Europe, and to emasculate local government? Can individual ministers preside over preventable disasters and stay in office? Is it acceptable for one party to hold power for a quarter of a century? And, of course, can members of a government exempt themselves from public morality?

What is bizarre is that nobody seems willing to say this is the core of the election. The real issues used to be economic, but the electorate knows there is as near consensus there as does not matter. But the divine right of Westminster governments – that is not only a real issue, but a gigantic one.

Although we seem to be too shy to say we care about such things, sleaze is a proxy that we dare to name. So – let us talk about it. DR RODDY COWIE
Belfast

Sir: There is a public hunger for parliamentary probity, gravity and responsiveness. This might be a good moment to introduce an Electorate's Charter, like the Patient's Charter, specifying standards of performance. My own profession has chosen this moment to reconsider the Hippocratic Oath. There is another principle by which we are adjured to work: "First, do no harm..." This should be graven in letters of fire on the minds of parliamentarians too.

The electorate is losing whatever measure of confidence it ever had in Parliament. A reformed and independent second chamber could have as a primary duty the disciplining and surveillance of the Commons. DR STEVEN FORD MRCGP
Hoydon Bridge, Northumberland

Sir: Mr Fayed behaved disgracefully in offering money to MPs and those who took the money behaved disgracefully too. They ought not to be in Parliament. Mr Merchant allowed himself to be trapped into folly by a girl of an age to be his daughter and he must not stand for Parliament again. But why have the crusading *Guardian* and *Sun* attacked sleaze only among Tories? Do they think the public so naive as to believe that there are no black sheep among the other parties? It really would be in the public interest if the job were done properly.

I see two clear outcomes of the scandals. Parliament must no longer regulate itself; and professional lobbyists must be banned. DONALD KING
Crookhill, Kent

Sir: In connection with the various sleaze accusations, we are hearing a lot about the "natural justice" that the accused are said to be entitled to. What do those who use the term mean by "natural justice"? Nature is "red in tooth and claw". Justice, like "fair play", is something that we agree to extend to one another. Unlike sleaze, there is nothing natural about it. DR D ZUCK
London N12



Goalposts move as Iraqis starve

Sir: The US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, makes it clear that the ever-moving goalposts relating to the lifting of the embargo on Iraq have again shifted ("US committed to hard line against Saddam's Iraq", 27 March). Compliance with UN resolutions concerning Iraq's weapons is no longer sufficient for the lifting of sanctions. Given the Security Council's dexterity since the end of the Gulf War, even if total compliance is achieved, another goal post will appear.

One condition to be complied with by Iraq is human rights. Yet according to the US-based International Humanitarian Law Commission report, compiled from UN agencies' own figures, 47,500 people died in one year alone as a direct result of UN sanctions. By 1994, 500,000 children were dead. Deaths from malnutrition have increased eightfold since 1989.

A project undertaken in Baghdad found 28 per cent of children stunted. There was severe vitamin D deficiency amongst the population. Diarrhoea, dehydration, typhoid, diabetes, hepatitis, marasmus and kwashiorkor (the last eradicated prior to the embargo) were soaring. Medication is almost non-existent, and surgery has been cut by 70 per cent and is often performed without anaesthesia because of shortage, the report states.

Chlorine and spare parts for water treatment plants are banned under the sanctions, so the water is severely contaminated and water-borne diseases also endemic. Yet in spite of this silent

holocaust in the name of democracy, when Ms Albright was asked on the US television programme *Saturday Night* (12 May 1996) if the deaths of half a million children "was worth it" in order to overthrow Saddam Hussein, she replied "... it is a hard choice, but yes, the price, we think the price is worth it." FELICITY ARBUTHNOT
London E9

Sir: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has endorsed the continued economic embargo aimed at the Iraqi people, which has already caused many thousands of deaths. These were not accidental or unforeseen.

In US law, international terrorism is defined as "acts dangerous to human life... that appear intended to coerce a civilian population or to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion". The embargo fits this definition.

The Additional Protocols of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 define as war crimes "making the civilian population the object of attack", as well as "launching an indiscriminate attack affecting the civilian population or civilian objects in the knowledge that such attack will cause excessive loss of life, injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects".

To starve a population falls squarely into this definition. High Contracting Parties to these conventions and protocols are required to prosecute individuals responsible for war crimes. Yet no

court has initiated any legal inquiry or proceedings in this matter. ELIAS DAVIDSSON
Reykjavik, Iceland

Benefit change hits disabled

Sir: It would appear that in the proposed changes to housing benefit little thought has been given to the impact on disabled people. The changes would limit the amount of housing benefit available for single people under 60 living in the private sector to the cost of shared accommodation.

This would mean that disabled people living in self-contained accommodation might have to move to shared housing. Not only is shared housing not suitable for many disabled people, but it may be impossible to find accessible shared housing. For example, it may be dangerous for someone with a visual impairment to share accommodation with other people who may inadvertently move furniture or kitchen equipment. Although the Government intends to exempt those they consider severely disabled, this will only affect a maximum of 6,000 people, a small percentage of the disabled people who would be affected.

These proposals could also prove very expensive. In 1994/5, 1,500 private-sector tenants received disabled facilities grants to adapt their homes. The average grant was £3,700. If these disabled people have to move to shared housing

they will need another grant. Added to this will be the increased cost to social services for community care if the shared accommodation is limiting the disabled person's independence. The regulations are now before Parliament and the proposals are due to be implemented in October. We would urge the next government to reconsider. BERT MASSIE
Director
The Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation
London EC1

Hong Kong press still awake

Sir: Your leading article (29 March) about Hong Kong's "worrying week", faithfully reflecting the fashionable view, in London at least, concludes that it is "harder and harder to express any criticism of the new order". As it happens, last week provided a couple of pointers in exactly the opposite direction which may indicate that we haven't all sunk into the trance you ascribe to us.

There were two big political controversies here during the week – the appointment by the future Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa, of a high-profile politician and date with HK life and political developments. When Lily was ripped away from her public I had given her up for lost.

I shall be returning home for the hand-over and the next 90 days will be a fairly emotional time. It is therefore wonderful that Lily will be here for the duration. CAROLINE GREEN
London SW15

On the first issue, Mr Tung ran into a barrage of criticism. As well as comment from politicians, there were a dozen editorials and columns pointing to the potential conflict of interest in the appointment, plus a batch of investigative stories on the surveyor's business record. On the second, a wave of protest, which was fully reported in the press, culminated in Mr Tung himself saying that the courts were free to question anything.

It may be that most newspapers here are generally supportive of Mr Tung, but that does not mean they have given up their liberty. After all, I guess it may be harder than it once was to find criticism of the coming new order in Britain in the biggest-selling daily in the land. JONATHAN FENBY
South China Morning Post
Hong Kong

Sir: Words cannot describe the excitement I felt when I recognised a face from my past on the front page of *The Independent* (24 March) – Lily Wong.

My relationship with Lily began some eight to nine years ago. I, like Lily, call Hong Kong home and am the product of an East-West marriage similar to Lily and Stuart's. When I moved to the UK in 1989 my parents continued to collect the stars and kept me up to date with HK life and political developments. When Lily was ripped away from her public I had given her up for lost.

I shall be returning home for the hand-over and the next 90 days will be a fairly emotional time. It is therefore wonderful that Lily will be here for the duration. CAROLINE GREEN
London SW15

Pay parents to stay at home

Sir: Polly Toynbee is taken to task by Elizabeth Young (letter, 28 March) for failing to acknowledge that many women would opt for full-time stay-at-home motherhood if they could afford to. Elizabeth Young suggests that child benefit should be increased, up to school age, so as to give mothers that choice.

This has long been argued by Michael Young and Professor Halsey, as a "Guardianship Allowance", payable to the parent willing to stay out of the labour market and be a full-time guardian. My own preference would be to extend the allowance to cover all the primary years, up to the age of 12 – and to pay it at a reasonable flat rate of £100 per week, though liable to income tax. Child Benefit would continue, albeit at a lower level, to reflect the number of children in the family.

This new manifestation of the welfare state might at first seem "expensive", in the prevailing language of public parsimony. But, as Elizabeth Young points out, the labour market would be easier for those with no option but to depend upon it, educational standards would improve, and crime and teenage disruptive behaviour would be dramatically reduced. ROGER WARREN EVANS
Swansea

Tricky figures from Forsyth

Sir: I congratulate Anthony Bevins ("Tartan dividend pays off for Scots", 24 March) for taking the trouble to check the veracity of Michael Forsyth's statistics regarding the difference in identifiable public expenditure between the nations which make up the United Kingdom. Most political journalists from London-based newspapers appear to accept the Scottish Secretary of State's figures and to quote them verbatim.

Here in Scotland we tend to view Mr Forsyth's statistics with a great deal of scepticism. Comparing identifiable public expenditure between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom is meaningless. Scotland and England, for example, are funded in quite different ways and local authorities in Scotland have more statutory responsibilities than their English counterparts. The Government is always careful to exclude *unidentifiable* public expenditure from its statistics, which invariably favours England. The statistics which Michael Forsyth and the Government use (and abuse) conceal as much as they reveal. LINDA MACNISH
Forres, Moray

Wedded bliss

Sir: Petronella Wyatt ("Marriage? No, I'd rather live", 28 March) lists among her reasons for wishing to remain single the belief that "sexual attraction runs its course in two or three years". Whilst I would not in any way attempt to dissuade her from the single life, if that is what she chooses, she should not be so dogmatic nor pessimistic. I have been married now for 16 years (to the same person). One of the main reasons I chose my husband was sexual attraction, and I feel no differently about him today. KATHARINE MOURBY
Cardiff

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April 1, 1997

analysis

A new partner for the Middle East

The United States has lost any credibility it once had with the Arabs as an honest broker for peace. Only Europe can fill the gap now, argues Robert Fisk

How soon will the explosion in the Middle East come? The signs are everywhere, even if – through amnesia or wishful thinking – they are largely ignored in the West. Almost 5,000 Egyptian students last week demanded a “holy war” for Jerusalem and were driven back at Cairo University by riot police. For the first time since the emirate was liberated by the United States in 1991, an American flag has been burnt in the streets of Kuwait. Iran has renewed its ties with the PLO after 18 years of mutual hatred – in a meeting that also went largely unrecorded. President Rafsanjani met Yasser Arafat in Islamabad – while outside Jerusalem, the mother of the Palestinian who slaughtered three young Israeli women with his suicide bomb announces that her son “died nobly”.

The Israeli secret services – largely regarded as death squads by Palestinians – have

been told to operate once again in Palestinian “autonomous areas”, while the PLO has warned that Israeli agents will be shot down if they are found. All relations between the Arab states and Israel are to be frozen, on the orders of the Arab League.

Why haven't the Americans – and, indeed, the Europeans – woken up to the imminent storm? Perhaps we journalists are to blame. After all, until only a few days ago, a BBC World Service reporter was still blithely talking about Israel's construction of a “Jewish housing project” on a “disputed” hill outside Jerusalem, as if all that was at stake was an argument over a public utility. The “project”, of course, is a Jewish settlement and the hill is occupied Arab land upon which any construction is in flagrant violation of UN Security Council Resolution 242, the resolution that was supposed to be the very foundation of the 1991 Madrid “peace process”.

It is not difficult to see how this kind of reporting can become mendacious as well as incomprehensible. If no more than a parcel of “disputed” land is at issue, how could it have led a Palestinian to murder three women in Tel Aviv? Even the Palestinian who killed three people at the Empire State Building – a murder equally incomprehensible when it was reported that he had no political motives – now turns out to have written a letter before his suicide in which he raged against the taking of Arab land by Israel.

It is, of course, too late to hope that the US will shake itself free of its thrall to Israel. Madeleine Albright devoted almost all her recent remarks on the crisis to the need for Arafat to prevent “terrorism”, devoting only the mildest criticism to Israel for the Abu Ghoneim/Har Homa Jewish settlement. US negotiator Dennis Ross's latest visit to Arafat and Netanyahu proved to be a

total failure. How pitifully Washington has fallen from the aspirations it held out to Arab and Jew at Madrid in 1991.

And how pathetic is the growing Arab appeal to Europe to intervene in the Middle East to save the peace. Europe? After the catastrophe of Bosnia, how can any Arab Muslim trust Europe? How, indeed, could any Israeli Jew trust Europe when from that continent's very heart came those who committed the most wicked crime of modern history, the Holocaust?

Yet Europe has been integrally involved in the “peace process”. It was represented at the Madrid summit. It has bankrolled the 1993 Oslo agreement. It rewarded both sides with peace prizes and embassies, rewards that will be kept, of course, by those who are now destroying the peace. It was Europe, too, which accepted – long before the US and Israel ever did – that the PLO should be involved in peace negotiations. British, as well as other European ambassadors, met Yasser Arafat's senior officials throughout the Seventies. There is still a rumour in the Middle East that many of Arafat's speeches between 1988 and 1992 were drafted by the then British ambassador to Tunis.

And it was the member states of the European Union in 1980 that drafted the Venice declaration, which specifically stated that the PLO should be “associated” with peace negotiations. The terms of the Venice declaration were repeated by European foreign ministers in Paris four years later when they added their support to the “right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, with all that this implies” (the last five words underlined in the official statement).

The Europeans maintained their commitment to Middle East peace. In Brussels in 1987, Community foreign ministers were demanding an improvement in Palestinian living conditions in the West Bank and Gaza, and giving preferential access to the Community for goods from the occupied territories. A year later, the EU was welcoming the Palestine National Council's acceptance of UN Security Council resolution 242 – calling for total Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab land in return for the security of all states in the area – the same resolution that James Baker was later to cite, in confidential letters to Arab leaders, as the basis of the post-Gulf War “peace process”.

There then followed the folly of the 1993 Oslo agreement, a deeply flawed private peace deal between Israel and the PLO that allowed both sides to delay the most important issues that separated them – giving Israel time, for example, to encircle Jerusalem with settlements such as Har Homa – which contained no international guarantees, which left half the Palestinian population with no “right of return”, and, most damaging of all, effectively allowed Israel to renegotiate UN resolution 242 rather than be compelled to abide by it. A supine United States – whose Middle East policy is indistinguishable from Israel's – has signally failed to stand by its obligations as an “honest broker” in the “peace process”. This is why so many in the Middle East are now looking towards Europe.

Enfeebled as it may be because of its lack of a common

foreign policy, Europe none the less has a political stake in the Middle East. Last year, President Jacques Chirac showed how France could renew its ties with its former mandate territories of Syria and Lebanon and, by travelling to Damascus, French foreign minister Hervé de Charette secured a place for France on the south Lebanese ceasefire committee last April, to the fury of the Americans and the Israelis. The French, as well as the Israelis, Americans, Syrians and Lebanese, now sit on that committee.

By visiting Jerusalem last October – and by publicly expressing his anger at the Israeli security men surrounding him before his visit to the West Bank – Chirac also

encouraged the Palestinians to believe that Europe understood their predicament and the imbalance in the “peace process”. Chirac felt personally humiliated, privately expressing his exasperation at the Israelis who insisted that he always left and entered his Jerusalem hotel via the tradesmen's entrance. But it was de Charette who bluntly asked this time “whether we can any longer talk about a peace process”. It is the French parliament which is now reconsidering whether Israel should still be given special trading status with the EU.

Perhaps what is needed is a closer realisation of what the Middle East – and the north African nations, as well – mean to Europe. America has iden-

tified national interests in the Middle East; cynics might sum them up as Israel and oil, though not necessarily in that order. Europeans, too, have interests, although they have something infinitely more important: the nations of the Middle East are our neighbours. They will never be neighbours of America.

Since the 11th century, the conflict between Christianity and Islam has been our conflict, so why should the Muslims trust us? Since the 11th century, the conflict between Christianity and Islam has been our conflict, so why should the Muslims trust us?

themselves to Arab dictatorships but none the less worthy, and essential to the nature of the proposed relationship.

So in the critical days ahead, Europe will have an opportunity to offer – at the least – a neutral third party as the American “peace process” inevitably fragments. Perhaps the catastrophic looming in the Middle East will force European ministers to unify their objectives in the region, even to follow France's independent lead.

In both Europe and America, the British foreign secretary Malcolm Rifkind has been doggedly criticising Israel's settlement policies, but it is going to need stronger stuff than this if Europe is to secure a role in the area. EU financial penalties against those who break their agreements might be a fair balance to the rewards that Europe has dutifully handed out over the past six years.

Perhaps it should also make an offer of peacekeepers from Nato nations who could ensure that the terms of the original 1991 “peace process” are kept, and who could judge how rigorously both sides are prepared to stick to the terms of this agreement. For only by a return to the land-for-peace deal based on UN resolution 242 – which the Arabs were originally promised – is a future blood-bath likely to be avoided.

Perhaps, too, European journalists (including the BBC) – as opposed to American reporters – must face more truthfully the moral issues of the Middle East crisis, however much they may be criticised for doing so. In any event, American credibility is now at its nadir in the Arab world. There is no reason why Europe should join it in disaster.



Getting involved: Jacques Chirac pushes away an Israeli bodyguard in Jerusalem last October

Photograph: Reuters

Since the 11th century, the conflict between Christianity and Islam has been our conflict, so why should the Muslims trust us?

God sends Channel 5 and oven gloves

I was at home last week, minding my own business (which I can't tell you about, obviously, as it was my own business), when there came a knock at the door. Then there came a ring at the door. Finally there came a shout of: “Anyone in?”

Reluctantly I stopped minding my own business, and went to answer the door, where I found a smart-looking young man with a large bag over his shoulder. “Good morning,” he said. “I wonder if you have ever read this little book?” And he pushed a religious tract into my hand, which I saw at a glance would lead to eternal salvation if I followed its precepts.

“No,” I said, “and nor do I want to. Eternal salvation sounds too gloomy by far. Temporary salvation, maybe. Thursday, definitely. But not the eternal kind.” His eyes never flickered. “You're not a religious person, then?”

“I have my own personal arrangements with God,” I said. “He doesn't bother me and I don't bother Him.” “Fine,” said the man. “How are you off for oven gloves?”

“Pardon?” I said, taken slightly off-guard. “We have some particularly good gloves at the moment,” he said, opening his bag to reveal a spread of domestic treasures. “This is the good old-fashioned cotton kind, absolutely proof against burns, in three traditional colours...”

“Hold on,” I said. “I thought you were a God salesman.” “And so I am,” he said. “If you had shown any signs of being saved I would have tried to save you, but as you were obviously beyond redemption, I thought you might buy some oven gloves.”

“Do you think oven gloves will redeem me in some way not known even to oven-glove manufacturers?” “I will ignore your snide tone,” he said. “I will merely point out that those of us who tramp from door to door trying to spread the gospel, and usually failing, have recently realised that we should diversify. We have unique access to the front doors of the kingdom. Why not use it to sell useful objects as well?”

“And make a bit of money on the side?”



Miles Kingston

on the side. Now, we have also got garden kneelers, clothes pegs, ironing board covers...”

He went through the usual list of pedlar's wares. As usual, I didn't really need any of them. As usual, I bought lots. I have almost enough gardening gloves now to start my own peddling business. Maybe that is how a lot of door-to-door pedlars get started. They're simply off-loading the stuff they have bought from other pedlars.

I started to close the door to indicate that I had run out of ready money.

“Well, if you're not going to buy any more,” he said,

“perhaps I could come in and get out with the rest of my business.”

“The rest of your business?” Reading the gas meter, perhaps?” I said, with a return of my snide tone. “Watering my house plants? Doing a bit of letter dictation?”

“Returning your TV set to Channel 5,” he said.

“You're a Channel 5 retuner?” I said.

I hadn't been expecting this one.

“Once you're a combination missionary and pedlar,” he said, “it is but a small step to taking on other functions. Many small fundamentalist churches have eagerly embraced the opportunity to learn a new skill, that of returning your TV set to receive the new channel. Indeed, you could say, could you not, that we men and women are all of us TV sets, human TV sets, as it were, but only programmed to receive what we want to hear. How easy it would be to retune our hearts to receive God's message! Would it not be better to point your aerial in the direction of good news? Why not let Heaven retune your heart now...!”

“No,” I said.

“No, what?”

“No, I don't want it.” “Don't want God's word? Or Channel 5?”

“Neither. Either, I do not want to receive God's word and I do not want to receive more television. In a sense, you know, we are all like off switches. We can all turn ourselves off and go to sleep.”

“You get a free gift if you let me retune you to Channel 5.”

“A free gift from Channel 5?”

“Yes. Some perfume.” “What kind of perfume?”

“Channel No 5, of course!” He roared with laughter.

He roared alone. Never swap jokes with a salesman, that's my motto. I started to close the door again. He bade me a reluctant farewell and started to retreat. I opened the door again. He stopped.

“As a matter of interest,” I said, “tell me one thing. Why didn't you diversify a little further and take the golden opportunity to do some canvassing for one of the parties in the election?”

“We did think of that,” he said.

“And?”

“We decided there were some things we wouldn't sink to.”

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Labour's offer to Sinn Fein was not naive nor a gaffe

All the main parties this week will expend time, words, and a great deal of energy proving how when in government they would shape events – and virtually none on how events will shape them. Yet it's the second that may prove, at least initially, the greater question. Just think of how the decisions that will bear down most immediately on an incoming Labour government will be less about changing Britain than responding to an external and fast-moving set of circumstances over which they have only limited control, with which any party in power would have to deal, and of which no potential Labour cabinet member has any ministerial experience: the hand-over of Hong Kong; a European agenda dramatised by the imminence of the Amsterdam summit, the pace of monetary union, and the 1998 British presidency of the EU; and, perhaps sharpest of all, Northern Ireland.

Mo Mowlam's observation, in a BBC Radio Ulster interview at the weekend, that there would be a "high possibility" of Sinn Fein joining inter-party talks when they resume on 3 June if they called a ceasefire now, is already being used by her critics as evidence that Tony Blair's Northern Ireland spokeswoman doesn't understand this simple truth – and thinks that by waving a wand she can wish peace on Northern Ireland. It really demonstrates quite the opposite. For all the gibes from Unionists and the political right about her "naivety", Dr Mowlam's remarks don't wash. She didn't make new policy. Nor did she modify a key condition that she and Blair have already made clear: for a post-ceasefire Sinn Fein to enter talks, there would have to be evidence that the IRA had ceased for a significant period surveillance and targeting operations. And once a decision had been taken to admit them, the republicans would have to sign up unequivocally to the Mitchell principles, which include renunciation of violence as a means of achieving their ends and a progressive hand-over of arms during the talks. Instead, Dr Mowlam's remarks remind the republicans first that Labour, like the present government, would ideally like to see Sinn Fein in talks, and second, that if they are to have any chance of joining them early the IRA would do well to start its ceasefire now. Indeed, she was explicit in saying that a ceasefire in – say – mid-May would not be early enough to justify Sinn Fein's inclusion in the talks by 3 June. She didn't consult Tony Blair before her interview, because she didn't have to; strikingly, moreover, Downing Street and the Northern Ireland Office did not, after a period of silent hesitation, join in the denunciation. In other words, Dr Mowlam knew exactly what she was saying.

This is more typical than her detractors allow. There has been speculation both outside – and more covertly within – her own party over whether Dr Mowlam would in fact be Blair's first Northern Ireland Secretary. Her invariably male critics like to point to a mildly gaffe-sprinkled past before she took the job. A Blair loyalist from the very first, they like to mutter, but is she quite up to it? A good deal of such speculation is based on a kind of subliminal sexism: Northern Ireland is boys' stuff, it seems to say. How could a woman, especially in an un-PC society as Northern Ireland, be



Donald MacIntyre

It is now pretty certain that Tony Blair would appoint Mo Mowlam as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

installed at Hillsborough as a real live Secretary of State? But she has dropped few, if any, changes in Northern Ireland, given the extreme sensitivity of every political statement there, that alone is quite an achievement. And she has also impressed by her energy, her seriousness, her detailed understanding of the brief's mind-bending complexities and the frequency of her trips to the province. It's now pretty well certain that Blair would indeed appoint her, and probably give her the unenviable but skilful Westminster Paul Murphy as her political minister of state.

So far, so good. But the fact that Dr Mowlam is indeed well up to the job doesn't mean, as she knows better than anyone, that an incoming Labour government has a magic solution. It suits Martin McGuinness, as he did yesterday, to imply that Tony Blair will be a much easier touch than John Major. But that underestimates not just Blair and Dr Mowlam, but also their understanding of the formidable obstacles in the way of even of a brand new government trying to make a fresh start. It's true that if Labour had a big majority, it could not be held prisoner by the Ulster Unionists in Parliament. But that's not the Unionists' only leverage: inclusive talks mean little or nothing if they don't include the Ulster Unionists. And while the UUP leader, David Trimble, has not gone as far as the DUP's Ian Paisley in saying he would never sit down with Sinn Fein, he has set a series of formidable conditions, including decommissioning of arms as a precondition of talks.

The Ulster Unionists' strength – relative to that of the DUP – after the general election, and in the local elections which follow, could yet decide how full a part Mr Trimble's party will play in the talks. The more ground Paisley gains, the bleaker the outlook may prove to be. Drumcree looms in July, and while yesterday's peaceful march in the Lower Ormeau was a tentative sign of hope, it could turn once again into a show of the sort of Orange strength that could yet be deployed if a Labour government were ever tempted to bypass them: the party's folk memory is still haunted by the 1974 Ulster Workers' strike that was faced by Merlyn Rees three months after coming into office. Nor are the republicans' intentions utterly clear, for all Mr McGuinness' smooth words yesterday. Some ministers had expected the IRA to declare a ceasefire a few months before polling day to put a fragile government on the spot: the fact that they didn't may indicate that there is still a powerful faction in favour of shunning dialogue.

One possibility is that the IRA will wait to see, if Labour wins, what Dr Mowlam does about potential confidence-building issues dear to nationalist hearts – such as transfers of prisoners, responsibility for Bloody Sunday, and the detention of Roisín McAuliffe – all of which she said she will consider in office. And even if they call a ceasefire after that, it could be that, as the events of the past three years demonstrate, this would be only the beginning. The only certainty is this: not just Dr Mowlam but Tony Blair is committed to trying to revive the peace process. Blair speaks about it more in private than in public, but it is now clear that he sees Northern Ireland among his highest priorities. That much John Major has bequeathed to his successor.

New crime law, old police culture

by Patricia Wynn Davies

It's a question of a "completely different mindset". That was how Dr Eric Shepherd, the forensic psychologist who first cast doubt on the Bridgewater murder convictions, last week summed up the real, as opposed to the theoretical, world of police investigations.

Dr Shepherd, an adviser to both police and defence lawyers, was spotlighting the potentially lethal mixture of the prevailing police culture and the new regime for restricting the disclosure of evidence in the 1996 Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act, which comes into effect today, following the minimum of opposition in Parliament. The biggest test for the members of the Criminal Cases Review Commission, the new miscarriage of justice watchdog which also begins work today, is whether they understand that cultural message. And the biggest test of that will be their approach to re-investigations, particularly the extent to which they will be content to allow the police to continue investigating themselves.

Just as the Bridgewater case showed just how poor successive police inquiries were at uncovering a miscarriage of justice, the 1996 Act (which in most cases lets the investigating police officer decide what is disclosed to defence solicitors) is a potent argument for a fundamental change of attitude. The members of the commission should consider what Dr Shepherd and Roger Ede, secretary to the Law Society's criminal law committee, have to say about the cultural question.

"The community and the courts," they write in their book *Active Defence*, published last week, "are led to believe that the evidence presented in cases by the prosecution, and upon which they rely, is the product of a quality investigative service rendered by police officers, civilian support staff and forensic scientists who are professionally trained, who are subject to supervision and quality controls, who have open minds, who are committed to exposing to the prosecution and the defence the gaps and anomalies in the police investigation, the case and the prosecution evidence. The reality does not support the belief. What is presented to the court in all too many cases is a complex, collaborative illusion."

The truth, they say, is that many police officers and even forensic scientists are untrained for their investigative tasks, there is no real quality control, and there are strong group pressures on police officers to do what they have always done – attach criminality to the suspect in the frame.

In a climate where "zero tolerance" extends only to criminality, and not to deficiencies in the justice system, there is no



Has the new miscarriage of justice watchdog got what it takes to carry out its own investigations into misconduct?

reason to expect that culture to change. The 1996 Act – the result of one of the most effective lobbying campaigns by the police – leaves officers to make key decisions about the disclosure of material to the defence at the very time they are building a case for the prosecution. But the mindset in the police station, which views the defence as a hindrance to the conviction of the guilty rather than a safeguard against getting it wrong, is very different.

Because the Act ignores the real world of police investigations, in effect expecting a police officer to reveal weaknesses in his own case, a supreme Criminal Cases Review Commission could ensure that future miscarriages go undetected. So will the commission be content to simply hand over investigations to police officers? Or will it appreciate that requiring police officers conducting a

re-investigation to dismantle a case constructed by their peers calls for a change in the professional habits of a lifetime?

Do the commission's members accept that it is the systemic failure by the police and the prosecution to disclose evidence inconvenient to their case which has caused the most serious miscarriages of justice over the past 20 years? Are they alive to the re-introduction of a new culture of non-disclosure?

With one or two exceptions – such as Dr James MacKeith, consultant forensic psychiatrist at the Maudsley hospital and an expert in false confessions – the membership of the commission has not inspired confidence. The chairman, Sir Frederick Crawford, is a former plasma scientist and university administrator and is probably better known for his prominence as a Freemason. Fiona King is a former senior Crown prosecutor; Laurence

and former member of the Police Complaints Authority; Leonard Leigh is professor of criminal law at the London School of Economics.

The Home Office was pleased to announce the inclusion of three "lay" members when the long-awaited list was unveiled in January. What experience will they bring? Edward Weiss chairs Lloyd's Syndicate Loss Reviews and is a former director of Chubb, the security firm; Anthony Foster is a former chief executive of ICI Chlorochemicals; Barry Capon is a recently retired council chief executive. No one is questioning the integrity of any of the members, but where is the expert for the defence?

How many of the members are aware of the huge disparity in resources and investigative powers between the police and the defence? How many understand the increasing difficulty in getting adequate legal aid to deconstruct the case theory? Paradoxically, one solution would be to take a cue from the world from which some of these commission members are drawn. When things go awry in the City, the Department of Trade and Industry can appoint senior QC's and accountants, equipped with powers to demand answers, to investigate alleged wrong-doings. The appointment of similarly armed senior barristers and solicitors, independent of the police or any other government agency, to ask the questions would be one way of building confidence in the system. But the commission's news release last week did not make encouraging reading, highlighting those powers it does not have, but which the police could exercise on its behalf, rather than those it has.

Yet we have now a machinery for examining miscarriages that for the first time is independent of government. The commission will be empowered to use the police for a re-investigation, but not obliged to; it will be able to exert, if it chooses, hands-on control of a re-investigation; it has wide powers, if it chooses to use them, to call for the disclosure of material, which the defence and even the prosecution may never have seen – and disclose it to the applicant.

Here is the opportunity for an independent body to effectively challenge the deep resistance of the system to admitting it may have been wrong. And since the passing of its mirror image, the 1996 Act, never has there been such a clear need to do so. Has this commission got what it takes?

The voters of Tatton can now judge

Suppose that Neil Hamilton, supported by his local Conservative association, does not yield to pressure to retire and actually fights the general election in the Tatton constituency. And suppose that the Labour and the Liberal Democratic candidates really do withdraw in favour of a single, independent, anti-sleaze candidate, as they promise to do. Can we imagine what such an election would be like?

Mr Hamilton's first instinct, I assume, would be to try to conduct a normal campaign. He would stand pat on the Conservative manifesto, he would extol the Government's economic success and he would demonstrate the virtues of Tory policies for law and order, education, Europe and so on. He would say that the Labour and Liberal Democrat candidates had stood down precisely because they feared debating such issues.

I cannot believe that such an approach would carry Mr Hamilton very far. The voters of Tatton can learn as much as they wish to know about these matters through the national media. Their response to Mr Hamilton would surely be "Yes, but Hamilton would surely be forced to fight on the ground his enemies had chosen.

Mr Hamilton would then, I imagine, continue with his tactic of complaining about the way in which the evidence to Sir Gordon Downey, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, had been presented by the *Guardian*. He would repeatedly state that *The Guardian's* reports were



Andreas Whittam Smith

An anti-sleaze candidate should concentrate on the two charges that do not require the evidence of Mohamed Al Fayed

"selective and were manipulated to show my guilt", and that the transcripts of Mohamed Al Fayed's evidence indicated that he was "motivated by hatred for me and revealed that there is no independent corroboration for his allegations".

He would rail at trial by newspapers and call in evidence the entrapment of fellow Tory MP Piers Merchant by a 17-year-old night club hostess, financed by *The Sun*. Mr Hamilton would position himself as the victim of injustice calling for impartial treatment.

But would an appeal for fair play work? After all, it is commonplace that when serious accusations are made, the person concerned may have to stand aside. In the case of criminal charges, the accused may have to await trial in prison; and where professional misconduct is alleged, the person concerned is usually suspended from his or her duties while an investigation is carried out. Moreover, Mr Hamilton has taken steps to correct the record. In the *Sunday Telegraph* at the weekend, he published excerpts from the evidence given to Sir Gordon Downey by his chief accuser, Mr Fayed, which he believed were favourable to his case. Two leaks may not make a right, but again I fancy the voters of Tatton will respond to Mr Hamilton: "Yes, but..."

Pretty quickly, therefore, Mr Hamilton would find that the election campaign in Tatton would focus on the transcripts of his and Mr Fayed's evidence to the Downey inquiry.

Where would an anti-sleaze candidate lay most emphasis? Probably not (repeat, not) on the most lurid aspect

of the alleged transactions between Mr Hamilton and Mr Fayed: whether or not cash was passed in envelopes stuffed with £50 notes. Mr Hamilton says that Mr Fayed and three aides are lying when they say this. The voters of Tatton would not know whom to believe.

Instead, an anti-sleaze candidate should concentrate on two, simple charges – that the Tatton MP had lied to Michael Heseltine, the Deputy Prime Minister, and that he had engaged in a fraud at the expense of the Inland Revenue. Either one is so devastating, if true, that everything else could be ignored. Neither requires the evidence of Mr Fayed. On the question of the lie, we have *The Guardian's* transcript of Mr Hamilton's evidence to Sir Gordon and Mr Hamilton's letter to *The Times* last Saturday, in which he adds a statement he made that *The Guardian* omitted.

A Cabinet Office memo notes that Mr Hamilton has given Mr Heseltine "an absolute assurance that he had no financial relationship with Mr Greer [the political lobbyist] and the President of the Board of Trade [at the time, Mr Heseltine] has accepted this".

Counsel put to Mr Hamilton that he did have such a financial relationship. Mr Hamilton replied: "I did not mention the commission payments when I spoke to Mr Heseltine... politics is a rough game... I knew that if there were to be another cause for adverse media comment against me... it could be used as a very big stick with which to beat me and to cause my resignation to take place." What did

The Guardian miss out? Mr Hamilton's further statement that he was "satisfied in my own mind that there was no deliberate misleading of" Mr Heseltine.

So there we have it: Mr Hamilton misled the Deputy Prime Minister, but not "deliberately". He was either a fool or a liar.

As to whether a tax fraud was committed, *The Guardian's* extracts indicate that the MP's tax return for 1988-89 showed as an expense (ie an offset) the cost of a flight (£1,430) which in fact had been paid not by him but by Mr Greer. What was Mr Hamilton's response? Perhaps his weakest in the whole saga: "my accountant... prepares my tax return". Yes, but the taxpayer must sign the tax return, stating that the "information I have given is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge and belief". Mr Hamilton knows how solemn is this undertaking he trained as a barrister specialising in tax.

In my picture of the Tatton election, with an anti-sleaze candidate in the field against the sitting MP, the issue of whether bribes were taken to represent certain people in Parliament and in their dealings with government would remain in the background. That question could wait until publication of the full Downey report and deliberation by the new House of Commons. The anti-sleaze candidate would not seek to usurp that process, nor wish to appear as if he or she were the candidate of Mr Fayed. Instead, equally crucial questions relating to the honesty of Mr Hamilton would be tackled head-on: Is he a liar? Is he a fraud?

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1973	184	235	5	47
1973	83	400	-	45
1973	140	202	+2	56
1973	15	195	-	48
1973	1025	700	6	54
1973	135	500	50	85
1973	2460	890	-	80
1973	3000	3975	+7	78
1973	3000	20	-	82
1973	2500	833	+8	82
1973	1000	652	+2	58
1973	700	307	+9	54
1973	2300	346	-	58
1973	248	320	+5	48
1973	252	300	-	50

lays

Terminal cloud in open skies

Michael Harrison



GAVYN DAVIES

There is no sterling crisis lying in wait for Mr Blair, but there is the question of EMU membership. If any question is likely to dog the next administration then this would be it, and there will be pressure for a decision as early as this summer.

What Brown should budget for after the election

After 18 years in opposition, the urge to act will sit heavily on the shoulders of a New Labour government. If elected this summer, yet history counsels caution, since several previous administrations have, in effect, blown their inheritance in the first few weeks of office.

Even now, it is possible to meet people, especially in the City, who see Messrs Blair and Brown as frontmen, and who expect a rapid lurch to the left should Labour win power. They point to the disastrous example of the victorious Wilson team in 1974, the most obvious example of a left-of-centre government attempting to implement an old-fashioned programme of "tax and spend". This quickly foundered, and Labour then spent years trying desperately, and unsuccessfully, to recover.

This comparison is quite ridiculous. New Labour has explicitly learned the lessons of Wilson in 1974. One of the key objectives since 1994 has not only been to jettison any vestige of "tax and spend" for the sake of winning the election, but also to keep expectations realistic for the first few years of government. Hence the Gordon Brown pledge to stick to the 1974 spending plans for the first two years of government. If there does turn out to be a landslide on 1 May, it would be a very odd landslide, built on sober promises and low expectations. A negative mandate perhaps, but so much the better for avoiding early mistakes in office.

With a sudden lurch to the left completely ruled out, the early experiences of Harold Wilson in 1964 and Margaret Thatcher in 1979 may be more relevant for the present case than Wilson in 1974. When Wilson won the election of 1964, armed with a programme of genuine reform and hot air in roughly equal measure, he was met on the doorstep of No 10 - almost literally - by Treasury mandarins demanding action to correct the balance of payments crisis that had been allowed to mount in the last months of the Manding chancellorship.

That very first weekend, Wilson, Callaghan and Brown were asked to choose between three options - devaluation of sterling, import quotas, or a temporary import surcharge. As Ben Pinnett writes in his biography of Wilson: "A decision of vital national importance could scarcely have been made under worse conditions: the decision taken barely out of an exhausting election campaign, with no recent experience of government. Not since 1945 had an incoming administration faced so severe a crisis. Then, however, the debate about financial arrangements had extended over a period of months. This time, there was a need for an instant decision."

Sadly, Wilson made the wrong decision, setting his face against devaluation and opting for an ineffective surcharge on imported goods. That instant decision, which Wilson never allowed to be properly reviewed by the

cabinet, scuppered his administration's chance of economic success, and ensured that the eventual devaluation of November 1967 would be a bitter political defeat.

There is no such sterling crisis lying in wait for Mr Blair this time, but there is the question of EMU membership to deal with. If any question is likely to dog the next Labour administration, then this would be it, and there will be pressure for a decision as early as this summer. The lesson from the 1964-70 Labour government is to think long and hard before coming to a view, and then to ensure that the whole Cabinet is effectively locked into whatever course the prime minister chooses to follow.

A different example - Mrs Thatcher's victory in 1979 - is perhaps the most interesting, since it pertains to the five issues of what to include in Mr Brown's July Budget. Some outside economists are arguing that the fiscal stance needs to be tightened, and that it would be advisable for the new chancellor to bite this bullet immediately, whatever commitments have been given during the election campaign.

They cite the example of the campaign of 1979, when Geoffrey Howe talked of the need to switch the burden of tax between income tax and indirect tax, and of the need to control public spending and the public sector borrowing requirement (PSBR). But he specifically denied Labour claims that he had

a secret plan to double the rate of VAT, and never suggested that he had any intention of raising interest rates.

Within six weeks of winning the election, the new chancellor introduced a June Budget which raised the basic rate of VAT from 8 per cent to 15 per cent (increasing the RPI by almost 4 per cent) and also hiked base rates from 12 per cent to 14 per cent. On the face of it, this was a poke in the eye for the electorate, yet the Howe Budget was not particularly unpopular, with the new chancellor winning a favourable approval rating of 38 per cent to 30 per cent in the polls. How was this possible?

It was possible because of the third main plank in the Howe strategy, a dramatic cut in income tax rates. The basic rate dropped from 33 per cent to 30 per cent, and the top rate from 83 per cent to 60 per cent. These income tax cuts more than offset the impact of the jump in VAT on take-home pay, which was roughly unchanged for the average family as a result of the Budget. So the 1979 Howe package, contrary to recent mythology, did not spring an unexpected tax increase on the electorate. Instead, it went for a more audacious version of the switch between direct and indirect taxation that had been promised during the campaign. It was therefore accepted by the electorate as an extension of what the Tories were promising, rather than a reversal of the spirit of their pledges.

It is difficult to be sure what the Treasury

brief awaiting Messrs Blair and Brown on the downsteps of Downing Street will say this time. Perhaps it will argue for an early tightening in fiscal policy, on the grounds that any increase in taxation becomes more difficult as the Parliament progresses. Some may even argue that enough loopholes have been left in the precise tax commitments made by New Labour to enable them quickly to raise the burden of tax, should this become necessary.

The alternative view would be that it is the spirit of the commitment on tax, and not the precise wording, that counts. New Labour is saying to the voters - trust us, we are different, we have no desire or apparent need to raise your taxes. Would they ever be forgiven for attempting to wriggle out of this commitment within weeks of the election, when nothing new had happened to justify the change? After all, the PSBR is improving relative to previous Treasury forecasts, and the demand management case for tighter fiscal policy can already be assessed on information publicly available before the election. The Treasury "books", in themselves largely a figment of political imagination, will contain nothing unexpected to justify such a risk.

Of course, a tax switch in the July Budget, enabling Mr Brown to introduce his 10p starting rate of income tax would be possible on the Howe model. But a significant rise in the overall burden of personal taxation? That would surely be an altogether different matter.

Property star Nick Leslau is planning a string of ultra-chic hotels across Europe. Tom Stevenson finds out what motivates him

Driven by the demon fear of losing it all

Nick Leslau's demons seem curious to the rest of us who rub by one pay cheque from disaster. A multi-millionaire 10 years ago in his late 20s, the property world's brightest young star says he puts in hectic 12-hour days not because he needs the cash but because he's scared.

"Abject fear of losing is what makes you keep doing it. Insecurity, of failure, of losing everything, of moving back to a bedsit in West Hampstead. Which is probably absurd. There's a fun element to it of course, but none the less a rather sad side."

It certainly does seem absurd for someone with such an apparent golden touch to worry so. Ever since he reversed his tiny property development company, Burford, into partner Nigel Wray's quoted company, Chartsearch, in 1986, netting £4m in the process, he has hardly put a foot wrong. Burford prides itself on having grown its net assets seven or eight times faster than the rest of the pedestrian property sector ever since, and the company has a fan club in the City to match.

It's hard not to like Leslau, despite the fact he's the sort of bloke you'd really love to hate. At 37, he's got it all - nice house in Hampstead, young wife, nice kids, and a puzzled look on his face when trying to work out whether it's £20m or £25m he has tied up in one of the businesses he has successfully spun off from Burford.

But he genuinely does not seem to care about the embarrassment of cash he's piled up

through a string of astute deals that have included buying the Trocadero, a leisure sector white elephant in London's Piccadilly Circus, acquiring the rights to Noddy and other Enid Blyton characters and, most recently, flying off at another seeming tangent to set up a joint venture with New York's most stylish hotelier.

"I have no interest in the having of it. Once you've got a nice house, you don't need more

"The idea is to be like The Ivy restaurant, where even in a recession you can't get a seat"

than one. I don't have the toys, the boats, the houses abroad."

This is a man who not only gets around town on a £2,000 Piaggio scooter but is so consciously unflashy the first thing he did after buying it was to rip off its go-faster stripes. So this is the motorised face of Burford, is it - lean, mean and frugal? "Well, actually I didn't use it today. I had a breakfast meeting this morning at The Ritz. I didn't really want to turn up with Scooter Helmet Hair. But I love my scooter. It's very humbling."

Looking around Burford's unexceptional head office, just off Oxford Street, it is hard to disagree with Leslau's claim

that the company, despite its high-profile image, is as unextravagant as its penny-pinching founder. A staff of just 28 run Britain's ninth-biggest property investor, which is now worth £600m 10 years after it was started from scratch. The usual clutter of files and old desks and office cups in an unprepossessing office block.

Until you walk into the chief executive's inner sanctum, that is, where the real man lives - frugal he may be, but this is a contrived simplicity, not harsh monasticism. From the corrugated iron desk (designed by his American sculptress wife, Maxine) to the bare plaster walls and the chairs that look old so chic and are old so uncomfortable, this is not the office of a man who dreams of running Land Securities.

This is the office where last week's move from industrial estate rent collector to drop-dead-trendy hotelier was hatched. Here, the decision to team up with Ian Schrager, who rubbed shoulders in 1970s New York with Andy Warhol and Bianca Jagger and now runs the Big Apple's most fashionable hotels, including the Paramount and the Royalton, suddenly makes sense.

Burford is planning a string of ultra-chic hotels in London and in main cities around Europe where it has struck an exclusive deal with Schrager. To be designed by Philippe Starck, the hotels, often renovations of redundant office buildings, are to be the last word in urban cool.

"With Ian Schrager's brand, which is fantastic because he



Dream team: Nick Leslau (left), Ian Schrager and Philippe Starck (right) in Leslau's frugal office

Photograph: Edward Webb

really has pioneered this sort of hotel, and our property management expertise, this could be a very exciting business. They're what I would call classically fashionable. Quite dark and seductive, very comfortable, really quite sexy. Great looking staff and there's a buzz."

"The idea is to be the equivalent of The Caprice or The Ivy restaurants, where even in a recession you can't get a seat. There are very few of what you've got but what you've got people want to be in."

Quite a sideways move for a company whose other assets include the freehold of a

builders' merchant in Battersea, some advertising hoardings on Edgware Road and Caesars Palace casino in Luton. But not a wholly unexpected development for a hyperactive team that has already spun off three businesses in 15 months - a publisher, a retail warehouse developer and the Trocadero.

Leslau says that despite appearances he is no workaholic. "My first meeting this morning was at 7.30, but I'm always home in time to put my kids to bed. The pace I'm working at now actually means I'm probably being modestly ineffective. A lot of all this is about

thinking time. The trick is to produce enough quality time so you make the right decisions."

Quality time looks like being deferred for a while yet, however. The hotels venture, in which Burford has put an initial £50m, is looking at its own stock market flotation. The Trocadero, of which Leslau is also chief executive, is thinking about its very own demerger of the Enid Blyton publishing interests and grappling to solve problems with its main tenant, Segaworld. And those industrial investments won't run themselves. Time to replace the go-faster stripes on the scooter.

Britain's pension cloud has silver lining

But is it sustainable - or could it lead to our own downfall?

Robert Laslett

Britain has a more favourable pension position than many other European countries. How has the UK got into this position? And is it sustainable or does it contain the seeds of its own downfall?

Everywhere in Europe, populations are ageing and the so-called support ratio - the number of working-age people creating the income out of which the living standards of each retiree has to be financed - is falling. But it is not falling as fast in Britain as in many European countries. The World Bank's World Population Projections suggest that the UK will have the highest support ratio by 2025. We have a relatively small proportion of the population in the 35-49 age range.

So while there are fewer middle-aged earners to support the retired in the UK now than there are on the Continent, the balance will shift as this group comes to retirement. That is the demographic silver lining in Britain's pension cloud. There are two other points that work to Britain's advantage.

One is that its pension commitments are much lower than elsewhere. State pensions take 6.4 per cent of the UK's GDP, a smaller share than in most other countries.

Since state pensions have to be met out of annual revenues - they are not supported by a fund - the lower the level of commitments the less tax needs to be raised to pay the bill. Indexing to prices has had a large cumulative effect: real gross weekly earnings have risen 32 per cent since 1980, and the share of the basic state pension in GDP has fallen accordingly. The result is a state pension that in relative terms is less generous than it used to be, and less generous than in other European countries.

Secondly, the UK has accumulated large stock of private pension assets - over 70 per cent of GDP - out of which future pensions can be paid. The EU countries largely lack such assets. The existence of private pension schemes is one of the

reasons the UK has been able to cut state pensions so much.

Since the UK scores well on all three counts, it is not surprising that it has much lower future pension commitments than most of continental Europe. IMF research suggests that average contributions of just 6.4 per cent of earnings are required to keep the UK system in actuarial balance, compared with 43 per cent in Italy.

These differences will in-

crease. By the middle of the next century, if present trends continue, the UK's required level of contributions will have fallen to 5 per cent of earnings over 70 per cent in Italy.

But will present trends continue? Demography can change in unexpected ways. Moreover, these extrapolations are based on the assumption of a fixed retirement age that is already breaking down in the USA, and may do so in the UK and

the rest of Europe. Demographic and retirement age pressures could thus mitigate the crisis for Europe but carry no necessary threat for the UK. It would be illogical to take comfort from comparisons that depend on the basic British state pension falling further and further behind the incomes of those in work.

Flemings Investment Trust Management's 1997 "Pension Map" suggests that over a third of the UK's 34 million households would retire in financial hardship (defined as less than 40 per cent of final earnings).

If the basic pension were to be raised in line with earnings instead of prices, OECD figures show that UK public pension liabilities would be similar to those of Germany, though still well below those of France or Italy. Hence the search for alternatives schemes, such as the Government's Pension Plus, which offer to deliver higher retirement incomes at no additional cost to the taxpayer.

But do private pensions in their present form offer a viable way forward?

The UK's private pension assets have grown almost exclusively on the back of occupational pension schemes. These have roots stretching back to the 1920s and 1930s, and grew enormously from the 1950s to the 1980s as more and more employees came within their scope.

Structural changes in labour markets, in particular towards more part-time and contract work, the growth of small companies and self-employment, and the development of personal pensions have all contributed.

Personal pensions, however, do not yet constitute a complete answer. So the UK's present and prospective pension position, attractive though it may be by European standards, does not give grounds for complacency.

* Chand & Jaeger "Ageing Populations and Public Pension Schemes", December 1996

Robert Laslett, London Economics

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Rugby will never be a mass sport so long as referees continue to make decisions which are incomprehensible

The game of rugby now finds itself in a strange position. On the one hand, the laws themselves remain as complicated as they ever were, in some respects more so. But, on the other hand, players, administrators and referees are all in their different ways trying to make the game more flowing, more watchable, more suitable for what they hope will be a mass audience in an era of professionalisation dominated by television.

Predictably enough, the result has been confusion all round. Forward passes are now ignored if blowing the whistle would interrupt a movement - particularly a movement which has resulted in a try. There were several examples of this in the Five Nations season that has just ended.

The scrum has also become a

penalty-free zone. Or, to be precise, one aspect of the scrum, the crooked feed, has become a regular feature of the game. When did you last see a strike against the head in an international or, for that matter, in the Courage First or Second Divisions? Things have not yet reached the stage they are at in rugby league, where the front rows lean forward at an angle of approximately 60 degrees to the ground and the scrum-half bounces the ball off the outside leg of the loose-head prop. But this is the way they are going.

And yet the laws are clear that a crooked feed is punishable with an indirect free-kick. It has always escaped me quite why a deliberate attempt to gain an unfair advantage should be treated more leniently than, say, failing to release the ball

when the tackled player is in no position to do anything of the kind. But even this minor penalty is seldom exacted these days.

In other respects, the scrum is the reverse of penalty-free. Indeed, it has become the most feared source of a useful three points. Or, if a penalty try is awarded, of seven.

Certainly, defending props will often deliberately collapse a scrum on their own line if they think that there by they can avoid a pushover try. But as Gerald Davies pointed out last Saturday in what our old journalists have been taught to call Another Newspaper, they do not engage in this practice nearly as much as referees clearly imagine they do. Sometimes the sinners are in the attacking front row. I have even seen a penalty awarded on the defending side's



ALAN WATKINS

22 and on its own put-in. What on earth would be the point of collapsing a scrum in these circumstances?

The award of penalty tries has become even more farcical. Ten years ago such scores were rare. Thirty years ago they were more or less nonexistent. I remember seeing Terry Price (a great player who sadly never

fulfilled himself) virtually taking the head off an opposing wing who was careering down the touchline. All the attacking side got in return was a penalty kick, being on the touchline, they duly missed.

Here is another area which urgently needs tidying up: the high or dangerous tackle. It is clear that the old games masters' injunction - "kicking low, boy" - is not always applicable in the modern game. The ball carrier has to be smothered, turned round, prevented, in the jargon, from "making the ball available". To accomplish this the upper part of the body has to be roughly embraced. So I am not calling for all high tackles to be penalised; merely for some consistency by referees in enforcing the law.

Then there is the line-out. There

is always the line-out. The laws now allow for some limited assistance to players in getting off the ground. Most referees interpret this to mean that, short of bringing rocket-launching equipment on to the field, anything goes. Forwards now soar heavenwards like inter-continental ballistic missiles. And, like those weapons, they often miss their target, especially when the ball is thrown to another part of the line entirely.

The theory appears to be that the line-out should be the same way as the scrum in that the ball should be secured by the side doing the throwing-in. But this does not seem to be working out in practice, which is, I suppose, a good thing. Thus, twice this year Newcastle's Doddie Weir and Garath Archer have had the better of Richmond's jumpers.

But rugby will never be a mass sport so long as rules and mauls remain such a large part of the game and referees continue to make decisions which are incomprehensible even to the most experienced television commentators. The present law puts a premium on catching the ball by preventing it from entering from a maul. The side that took the ball into the maul and failed to recycle it then has the put-in at the ensuing scrum awarded against them.

It is surely time to return to the old law which decreed that the side going forward should have the put-in. I would, however, go further. The old law also contained the doctrine of the last throw, which meant that a side defending desperately was deemed to be going forward. This would certainly not be brought back.

Menu's ideal start to title race

Gwyn Dolphin reports from Donington Park on the start of the British Touring Car Championship

After three consecutive finishes as runner-up in the British Touring Car Championship, Alain Menu gave his title pursuit the best possible start with a pair of victories at Donington Park yesterday.

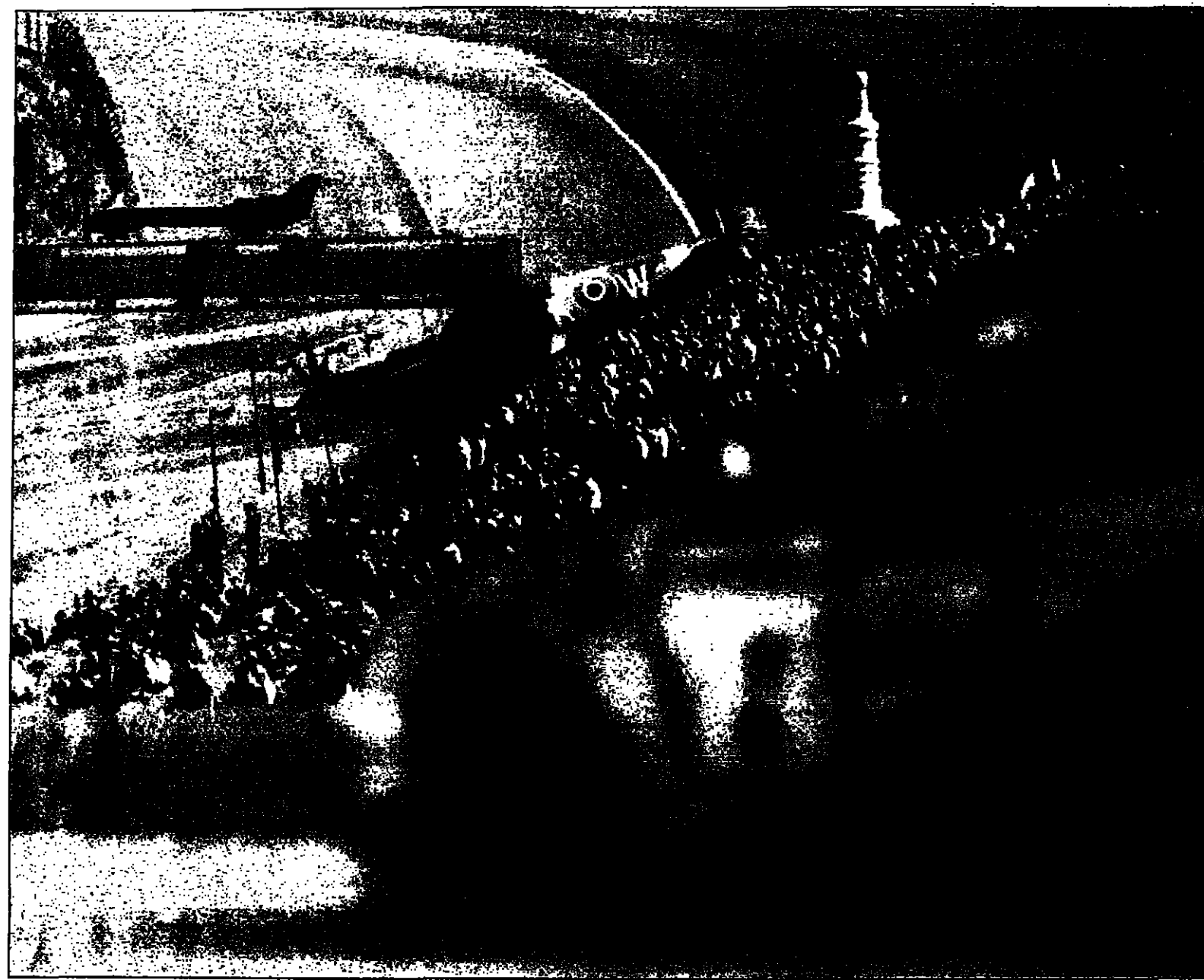
The Swiss, who was out-paced by his team-mate, Jason Plato, in Sunday's qualifying sessions, was never headed in his Williams-run Renault-Laguna and jumped into an immediate championship lead.

Electrifying starts ensured that Menu was ahead of the pack by the time the world's top touring car racers reached Donington's first corner. Such was his dominance that he was able to back off and cruise to the finish of the second race.

"The team told me to take it easy and to make easy means backing off a lot," Menu said later with a smile.

Plato gave chase to his more experienced partner in both races, finishing the day's opening round in second place. However, when he was well placed to repeat the result in the second race of the day, his Renault's engine overheated and forced him to retire. "I'm still happy though. Being fastest in qualifying gave me enormous confidence and I learned a big lot," the 38-year-old said.

Plato's retirement from the second round ensured the



Dog fight: Alain Menu, driving a Renault Laguna, speeds past the Spitfire on display at Donington Park on his way to victory in a typically close-fought opening race of the British Touring Car Championship yesterday

champion, Frank Biela, of a podium place. His four-wheel drive Audi, forced to run 95kph heavier than its front-wheel drive rivals, had to give way to Rickard Rydell in the closing laps of round two, dropping to third behind the Swede's Volvo. "This result was better than I expected. I'm sure we'll improve but Menu already has a big lead in the title chase," the German said.

Both Biela and Volvo Rydell were forced out of the day's first race with damaged radiators,

consequences of the close racing which brought over 30,000 spectators to the Leicestershire track. The second Volvo, driven by Kelvin Burt, was third in the opening round, just holding off David Leslie's Nissan, but gear selection problems dropped him to ninth in the day's other event.

The day could hardly have gone better for Menu. Apart from the mixed fortunes of Biela and Rydell, Gabriele Tarquini, the former BTCC champion, was only able to claim seventh and fourth place finishes. The Hor-

nda driver closed on Biela as the second race wound down but, as he explained afterwards, an accident in qualifying had turned his pace-setting car into a mid-field runner.

His team-mate, James Thompson, proved much quicker but lost a wheel in the first race and was forced to fight back from a spin in race two. The Yorkshireman was lying second, just ahead of Plato, when the Renault driver tried to pass. Thompson spun off then staged a fightback to finish sixth.

In his charge, he passed Derek Warwick, the former grand prix driver who was making his debut in a Vauxhall run by his own team. Warwick brought his car home in the points in both races, while his team-mate and the 1995 champion, John Cleland, was out of luck, suffering clutch failure in the second race.

Scotland's Colin Gallie made an impressive debut, claiming victory in the Total Cup for Independents in his Pyramid Motorsports BMW320i.

BRITISH TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP (Donington Park) Round One (12 laps): 1. Menu (Renault Laguna) 29m 36.77sec, 2. Plato (Ford Sierra) 30m 1.14sec, 3. Burt (Volvo 740 GLE) 30m 1.14sec, 4. Leslie (Nissan Primera) 30m 1.14sec, 5. Rydell (Volvo 740 GLE) 30m 1.14sec, 6. Burt (Volvo 740 GLE) 30m 1.14sec, 7. Burt (Volvo 740 GLE) 30m 1.14sec, 8. Burt (Volvo 740 GLE) 30m 1.14sec, 9. Burt (Volvo 740 GLE) 30m 1.14sec, 10. Burt (Volvo 740 GLE) 30m 1.14sec, 11. Burt (Volvo 740 GLE) 30m 1.14sec, 12. Burt (Volvo 740 GLE) 30m 1.14sec.

Testing time ahead for Frentzen

DAVID TREMAYNE reports from São Paulo

Heinz-Harald Frentzen made no bones about his performance in Sunday's Brazilian Grand Prix. "It was nothing sensational," he said of a race in which he trailed home in ninth place while his team-mate, Jacques Villeneuve, won convincingly.

"A bad start - a driver problem - then I got stuck behind two Jordans. After my second pit stop I had a gear-change problem. The return spring on the right-hand gear-lever paddle wasn't working because of a problem with the steering-wheel assembly, so I had to push the lever back every time with my middle finger. I could only shift at low revs and sometimes in shifting it down I went down another gear."

The young German was drafted into Williams to replace Damon Hill, and Frank Williams' decision to employ the young German with a reputation to rival that of Michael Schumacher during their days as Mercedes-Benz sports car partners aroused strong criticism. Thus far, Frentzen has been annihilated by Villeneuve, who himself was frequently beaten by Hill in the latter's successful 1996 championship season. But he insists that his confidence, although battered, remains intact.

"I won't give up that quickly," he said after the race. "I get more motivation out of this. I need to test because I'm not happy with the car in qualifying set-up, although we did discover that I had a broken front damper in qualifying."

Villeneuve completed 6,000 kilometres of pre-race testing when he graduated to F1, using it to hone his unusual set-up. "He prefers to run the car as stiff as a kart rather than have it absorb bumps," Patrick Head,

the Williams technical director, said. "Then he takes care of catching it when it slides."

"Jacques certainly runs a different set-up to me," Frentzen said. "As a new guy to Williams, my way of setting up a car is different. The team is giving me advice and at the moment I'm still working out my point of view of setting up the car, and also Williams' point of view. At the moment, it's a mixture of Damon Hill's set-up and my own, and I look forward to more testing to work in my direction."

The Williams is difficult to set up because it has more options than most cars. "Technically it is very advanced," Frentzen said. "So from a driver's point of view, and mine especially, there is much more information which I have to sort out before I make the car 100 per cent. The more information, the more things you can make wrong."

"If I knew what the problem is, we would fix it," Head said. "Maybe the bumpiness here threw him. He seems to like it better when we've got more fuel in the car. I wouldn't say either of his performances so far have been very exciting, but the season's got a lot of races in it."

"I think it's going to make him half the season to get into it. Obviously, we'd like him to step into the car and be on the pace straight away, but he's not and it's something he's got to work out. I could hardly imagine that he believes that was a particularly great performance." This time last year, both Williams drivers were the class of the field. Now McLaren-Mercedes leads the constructors' championship and the competition is hotting up. If Frentzen were to receive a report right now, it would read: "Nice fellow, but must do better." Assuredly, Williams will not expect his current form to continue for long.

YESTERDAY'S RACING RESULTS

CHEPSTOW
2.00: 1. OUT HAWKING (Mr Brown) 15-8, 2. Holy Joe 15-2, 3. Kaddai 6-1, 10th, 4. 1/2, 5. 1/2, 6. 1/2, 7. 1/2, 8. 1/2, 9. 1/2, 10. 1/2, 11. 1/2, 12. 1/2, 13. 1/2, 14. 1/2, 15. 1/2, 16. 1/2, 17. 1/2, 18. 1/2, 19. 1/2, 20. 1/2, 21. 1/2, 22. 1/2, 23. 1/2, 24. 1/2, 25. 1/2, 26. 1/2, 27. 1/2, 28. 1/2, 29. 1/2, 30. 1/2, 31. 1/2, 32. 1/2, 33. 1/2, 34. 1/2, 35. 1/2, 36. 1/2, 37. 1/2, 38. 1/2, 39. 1/2, 40. 1/2, 41. 1/2, 42. 1/2, 43. 1/2, 44. 1/2, 45. 1/2, 46. 1/2, 47. 1/2, 48. 1/2, 49. 1/2, 50. 1/2, 51. 1/2, 52. 1/2, 53. 1/2, 54. 1/2, 55. 1/2, 56. 1/2, 57. 1/2, 58. 1/2, 59. 1/2, 60. 1/2, 61. 1/2, 62. 1/2, 63. 1/2, 64. 1/2, 65. 1/2, 66. 1/2, 67. 1/2, 68. 1/2, 69. 1/2, 70. 1/2, 71. 1/2, 72. 1/2, 73. 1/2, 74. 1/2, 75. 1/2, 76. 1/2, 77. 1/2, 78. 1/2, 79. 1/2, 80. 1/2, 81. 1/2, 82. 1/2, 83. 1/2, 84. 1/2, 85. 1/2, 86. 1/2, 87. 1/2, 88. 1/2, 89. 1/2, 90. 1/2, 91. 1/2, 92. 1/2, 93. 1/2, 94. 1/2, 95. 1/2, 96. 1/2, 97. 1/2, 98. 1/2, 99. 1/2, 100. 1/2, 101. 1/2, 102. 1/2, 103. 1/2, 104. 1/2, 105. 1/2, 106. 1/2, 107. 1/2, 108. 1/2, 109. 1/2, 110. 1/2, 111. 1/2, 112. 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